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BUFFALO BILL'S SWOOP. BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



GETTING DOWN FROM HIS HORSE, THE UNKNOWN, WITH SOME STONES, MARKED OUT A SPACE ABOUT TWENTY FEET SQUARE.

Buffalo Bill's Swoop;

OR,

THE KING OF THE MINES.

A Companion Story to "Buffalo Bill's Bonanza," and a Romance in the Career of the Life-Long Pard—Hon.

W. F. Cody—"Buffalo Bill," and Dr. Frank Powell—"White Beaver."

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

FOR LOVE AND FOR GOLD.

Two persons sat in a seaside pavilion, lazily eating a six o'clock dinner, while their eyes were watching the sunset beauties of the evening, for the ocean was gilded over with golden tints, and the skies, becoming overcast with dark clouds were full of roseate hues.

The clouds, rising above the forest landward were edged with silver, while the shadow and sunshine rested in striking contrast over all.

A few rods back of the pavilion was a hotel, where pleasure-lovers from a neighboring city were wont to drive down for a day's enjoyment, or a dinner by the seaside.

The two who thus sat there were no ordinary-looking couple, for the man was tall, of magnificent physique, dressed in the height of fashion, and had a face to remember.

He was a young man, scarcely over twenty-three, and yet every feature was stamped with experience, if a sad one, for his smile was almost a sneer, his eyes were penetrating, but not true, and though 'most any one would have called him handsome, the reader of the human countenance would have said that he was a gold-lover, wicked and cruel.

His companion was a woman of twenty, perhaps, and yet she might have been but eighteen; yet a certain calm dignity of mien, and her tall, well-developed form made her appear older.

Her face was full of that innocent loveliness so fascinating in woman, and that she loved her companion with her whole soul, her every look and action showed.

Their dinner was over, and the waiter had been dismissed, with an order to send the vehicle around, in which the two had driven there from the neighboring town.

"Is not that a sail, Clarice?" asked the man, as he lighted a cigar and arose.

She looked in the direction indicated, and replied:

"No, Carter, I do not see a sail on all the broad ocean before us."

"Wait until the sun glances again upon her sails—stand just here, and look just there."

He drew her toward him as he spoke, her back to him, and, as he pointed with one hand he hastily held the other over her tiny cup of after-dinner coffee.

The hand did not tremble, though it held a small paper, and emptied a powder therefrom into the coffee.

"I do not see it, Carter, and there comes our buggy," she said, wholly innocent of his act.

"Drink your coffee, Clarice, for see, you have not done so."

"I do not care for it, Carter."

"It will be chilly driving back, so you must do so to warm you up."

She smiled, and raising the cup to her lips, as she stood by the table, drained the contents.

A wicked glance shot through his eyes as she did so; but he said calmly:

"When I drove down here yesterday, I enjoyed it so I was determined to have you come, especially as I wished to have a very sober talk with you, Clarice."

"You do not seem like yourself of late, Carter, and I have almost feared you were tiring of me."

He made no reply, but aided her into the buggy, took the reins from the stableman, to whom he threw a piece of silver, and started off at a swift trot, taking the road that bordered the beach, giving them, as they drove along, a fine view of the ocean.

"Carter, you seem troubled," said the woman, as he drew the horse to a walk.

"I am troubled, Clarice, and I will tell you why. I have told you nothing of my antecedents, and since the time I met you, you have trusted me blindly."

"I have indeed, Carter."

"I have told you that I was rich, and I will be soon; but I dare not tell my parents of my marriage to you, for I am expected to marry a cousin of mine, who is a great heiress."

"If I marry her I get my fortune, and—"

"But, Carter, you—"

"Hear me, Clarice, to the end!"

"You know that I love you, and I wish to feel that you will make a sacrifice for me. I am compelled to marry this girl or become a beggar, and I wish you to allow me to do so!"

"Carter!" and her eyes blazed.

"Hear me patiently, Clarice, and then I will see how deep your boasted love for me is."

"It is so deep that I married you secretly, when my parents warned me against you, Carter Creighton."

"Very true, and I will now see if that love still remains firm enough to trust me."

"Let me hear what you have to say, Carter, and quick, please, drive up to the town, for I feel very strangely. It is getting dark, too, and the storm will overtake us."

"What is it makes me feel so, Carter?"

"You doubtless ate too heartily, Clarice; but to my story."

"My father will beggar me if I refuse to marry my cousin, while if I do marry her I get my fortune and hers, and I ask you to allow me to do so; to make her my wife in all eyes except yours and mine, and then, when I have full control of the estates, my conduct shall be such as to force her to seek to free herself from me by a divorce."

"Then, when free, Clarice, I will come back to you, and happy indeed will be our lives."

"Do you say yes, Clarice, and trust me?"

He fairly started, hardened sinner that he was, as he saw her face, so full of fierce scorn and anger it was, while she said in a voice that quivered with passion:

"Carter Creighton, I believed you to be a man, and now I loathe you, when you expect me to sin against a true woman, against myself and my God, to enter into a compact so heinous, that you may revel in riches."

"No, no, you do not know me, Carter Creighton, and no longer will I keep our marriage secret, but let the world know it, that you may be punished as you deserve, for that would break down your hopes of fortune—Oh, Heaven! how strangely I feel—where am I?"

She had suddenly become low-voiced and calm, and stretched out her hands, as though groping in the dark.

The man was white-faced now, and stern, and he muttered:

"It is as I thought; she will confess all and ruin me."

"Now to act, for yonder is the boat and she is fast losing consciousness."

The woman's head had drooped over upon his shoulder, and her eyes had closed.

But there was no pity in his heart, because she was at his mercy, and he drew his horse to a halt a few feet from a boat that was drawn up on the beach and fastened to a stake.

The sun had set, the skies were now black with storm-clouds, and ere long a perfect tempest threatened to break.

But the man heeded it not, but securely hitched his horse to the stake to which the boat was attached.

The wind was off-shore and increasing, and there was not a house or another being in sight than those two.

The surf was blown back by the wind, and did not fall heavily upon the beach.

"This storm will help me, for I will not have to do the work myself," he said, harshly.

"No, instead of rowing out and letting her fall overboard, as I intended, I shall merely have to bind her, and then set the boat adrift."

"Once she is gone, and Nellie whom I love shall be my wife, and her vast fortune shall be all my own."

As he spoke he unfastened the boat's painter and began to force it toward the sea.

He got it down by sheer strength, until one end touched the waters.

Then he went back to the buggy, took the unconscious woman in his arms and placed her in the boat, binding her feet and hands.

The storm now broke in fury, the lightning flashed continuously, and the thunder rolled through the clouds like the discharge of hundreds of pieces of cannon, while the frightened horse was threatening to break away.

Calming the animal with a word now and then and unheeding the pelting of the storm, the man worked with almost superhuman energy and forced the boat into the waters.

Wading boldly in to his waist, he gave the boat a violent shove, while he sprang back to safety himself and cried aloud:

"Go to your death, Clarice, my bride! You stood between me, my love and fortune, but will do so no more. I am free at last!"

His face looked like that of a fiend as he uttered the words, and he waved his arms, as though to motion the boat and its precious load further away out upon the storm-driven waters.

The fierce winds, running with the strong tide, took the boat and drove it along before them over the wild waves, and as it disappeared from sight, even the livid lightning revealing it no longer to his straining eyes, he turned away, unhitched his restive horse, and springing into the buggy drove swiftly away in the storm, his face blanching as he recalled his atrocious crime, and his lips quivering as the lightning played about him.

Furiously he drove along, haunted by his black deed and muttering prayers and curses alternately, until the lights of a city came before him, and he drove into a livery-stable and left the horse.

"A bad night, sir, and you are drenched to the skin," said the liveryman.

He made no reply, threw a bill to him and strode down the street to a hotel.

"My bill, sir!" he said almost savagely to the clerk, while he started at sight of himself in the mirror, so white, haggard and wretched did he look.

"Will you take the ten o'clock train, sir?"

"You will wish a carriage, sir, for the lady—"

He started, but said:

"She left this afternoon, and I need no carriage, so send up for my valise."

The clerk obeyed, wondering at his strange guest, who a moment after seized his sachel and went out into the storm once more.

A short walk brought him to the depôt, and soon after, drenched, white as a corpse, hard-faced, he was flying along on a train, trying to drown remorse at the cruel deed he had done.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE CAVALCADE.

In one of the wildest portions of that weird land of Montana, a strange cavalcade was making its way along, following no trail, but evidently without fear of not reaching its destination wherever that might be.

It is long years after the strange scene, described in the foregoing chapter, when one, in the semblance of magnificent manhood, sent a woman out upon the ocean, bound hand and foot in a small boat, in the teeth of a terrible storm.

And yet, in that strange cavalcade, little changed in the decade and a half years that have gone by, can be seen that same man, that assassin.

The years have made him harder, sterner, more cynical in expression; but the same handsome face remains, and the superb form has but increased in strength and manliness.

He is dressed in the garb of a miner, his black pants stuck in the tops of high boots, and a silk scarf tied in a sailor knot under the collar of his blue woolen shirt.

A sombrero is upon his head, and a belt is about his waist, but in it are no arms, and one hand rests in a sling, showing that he is wounded.

Behind him ride five others, who are also unarmed, and that they are prisoners is shown by the fact that a negro in the uniform of a sergeant in the United States Army, rides by the side of the first-described prisoner, Carter Creighton, while behind the others come two Chinese horsemen, armed to the teeth, and acting as guards.

In the rear of these ride two youths, as different as daylight and darkness, the one being a reckless-faced, sun-bronzed boy of about sixteen, dressed in red woolen shirt, slouch hat, buckskin leggings and a hat that almost serves the place of an umbrella, so large is its rim.

He is armed with revolvers and a bowie, wears a rifle slung at his back, and his good-natured, saucy, devil-me-care face has gained for him the name of Old Nick's Kid.

His companion is apparently older, and his face is one to see and never forget, as the great haunting eyes seem to look into one's soul, while every feature is chiseled with the perfection of marble.

His large dreamy eyes, in that land of nick-names, soon won him the title of Deer-Eye Dick.

His clothing was a corduroy sack coat and pants, the latter stuck in the tops of handsome army boots, and his gray slouch hat had the brim pinned up on the left side with a gold pin representing a bowie-knife.

His hair was golden, and worn in waving waves upon his shoulders, and one to see him would have thought him out of place upon the frontier; but he rode with the ease and grace of a perfect horseman, and about his slender waist he carried a pair of silver-mounted revolvers and the inseparable bowie-knife, the hilt being handsomely carved.

The negro sergeant, who guarded the prisoners, along with his Chinese allies, was almost a giant in stature, and of powerful build, while his face was full of resolution, intelligence and courage.

He answered to the name of Sergeant Nicodemus Toby, and his beau ideal of manhood led the cavalcade in the personage of a man, whom to see is not to forget, for it was no more or less than Buffalo Bill, the noted scout, Indian-fighter and guide.

Mounted upon a superb white horse, which he rode with consummate equestrian grace, he carried at his back a repeating-rifle, and in his belt revolvers that had done more good service than any other pair upon the border.

Ahead of his horse trotted a huge dog—a cross between a Russian bloodhound and a St. Bernard, and a noble brute to behold, although as savage-looking as a Rocky Mountain lion.

By the side of Buffalo Bill rode a lady, and, look well into her sad, lovely face, reader, and recall where you have seen it before?

Go back a number of years, to that little pavilion on the sea-side, when the man, a prisoner riding by Sergeant Toby's side, poured the drug in her coffee, and, half an hour after, set her adrift in that open boat to die.

But no, the frail skiff, as he had believed, was

a life-boat, and it had withstood the fury of the waves, and she had been picked up far out to sea by a China-bound vessel, carried to that far land, and after long absence, had returned home to find that her husband had obtained her money—her parents having died through his act—and had squandered it, had not married the cousin he sought to destroy; but by his crimes had been driven to seek refuge in the Far West.

Year by year she had followed him through his life of crime in mining-camps, to at last see him a prisoner, hunted down by Buffalo Bill, then chief of scouts at a fort in Montana.

Though across the threshold of thirty years, her beauty of face and form yet remain, only her face has a look of touching sadness, strangely blended with one of resolute courage.

Her habit was of buckskin and blanket, and had seen hard usage, and her hat was a man's sombrero, but the one did not hide her grace of form any more than did the other hide her beauty of countenance.

She was mounted upon a black horse, and rode well.

Behind these two, and between the negro and his prisoner, and Buffalo Bill and Clarice Creighton, were two others, and the last to speak of in the little party, if I except a number of horses, some with and some without pack-saddles.

These two, following in the hoofs of Buffalo Bill's and Clarice Creighton's horses, are an old man and a young girl.

The former is clad in a rudely-made blanket suit, wears a belt of arms, and a rifle at his back, and the sombrero shades a head of long silvery locks, and a face bronzed by exposure where it is not covered by his snow white beard, which falls to his waist.

Not unlike the picture of Rip Van Winkle he looked, while his face is stamped with nobility of soul and his eyes beam with the true humanity that is in them.

By his side, mounted upon a wiry gray mare, is a young girl whose costume of beaded, feathered and quilled buckskin is worthy of an Indian queen.

Her wealth of golden hair is shaded though by a man's slouch hat, ornamented with a chain of bits of solid gold, as dug from the mines, and looped up upon the side with a silver circle, in the center of which is skillfully cut out an odd device, for it represents a hand pointing toward a wolf, whose paw rests upon a human skull.

The young girl is scarcely over fourteen, her form is perfection, her face handsome, brilliant and as fearless as a boy's.

She rides as though she knew not that she was riding, and, as a vulture suddenly swept above their heads, she drew a revolver from her belt, with a dexterity that would have driven a cowboy into an ecstasy of delight, and aiming quickly she pulled trigger.

With the sharp report the vulture fell headlong to the earth, while Buffalo Bill called out: "A dead-shot, Miss Rose," and turning to the old man by her side, he continued:

"Parson, if it becomes known in the East, where you are going, that your granddaughter is such a dead-shot, after her life upon the border, you need not fear burglars ever troubling you."

"Thank you, Mister Buffalo Bill; but if you call that a good shot when we reach the fort I'll give you a specimen of my skill," said the maiden, gayly.

"Good! and I'll get up a shooting-match for a prize; but I warn you that if Deer-Eye Dick shoots against you, you'll have to look to your laurels, Miss Rose, as he never misses," the scout said, glancing back at the youth he spoke of, who smiled modestly, as he raised his hat at the compliment.

The maiden was about to reply when a whistle from the scout and leader, caused all to glance ahead.

There they beheld a stream, dashing along between rocky banks and barring their way.

A halt was called upon its banks, and the scout, after a short search, found a place where the torrent could be forded, and he plunged his horse boldly in.

The waters arose horse-breast high, but Clarice Creighton followed quickly and then the others in line, the loose horses crowding in among the prisoners.

The leaders had reached the other shore, when, suddenly, the horse ridden by Carter Creighton stepped beyond his depth, struggled, reared, fell backward and his rider was hurled into the torrent.

A cry arose on all sides, for, while the horse regained his footing, the man, wounded as he was, was swept away among the surging rocks.

"He will drown!" arose the cry from more than one.

But in response a rifle was thrown to the shoulder and a report followed, while from the lips of the Chinese who had fired the shot, came the words:

"Bad 'Melican man no cheatee hangman."

With the crack of the Chinese rifle the struggling form of Carter Creighton was seen to sink beneath the rushing waters, and those whose eyes were riveted upon him saw him rise

no more, and in dead silence the strange cavalcade rode on, while Clarice Creighton said in a low tone to Buffalo Bill:

"He has died as he sought to have me die fifteen years ago."

"God forgive him, for I never can!"

CHAPTER III.

A VILLAIN'S RETROSPECTION.

LIKE a mill-race dashes along a mountain torrent, broad, deep, foaming and studded with rocks.

Yet it bears upon its bosom a man—a man struggling for life against the fierce flood—a man, with a gash upon his forehead where a bullet had cut its way along, and with one arm doing but little service, as it is bandaged on account of a wound.

It is the man, Carter Creighton, who, a few moments before was thrown into the swiftly-flowing waters by his horse, and, fired upon by the Chinese, was left to his fate, which was supposed to be instant death.

Those who saw him swept away, crippled by his wounded arm, felt that he must die.

Those who saw him sink from sight, at the crack of the Chinese's rifle, seemed to know that he had been killed.

Even without being shot, could he live, crippled as he was, in that mountain torrent?

But they knew not the man, and even the scout, Buffalo Bill, looked upon what had occurred as an accident, where it really had been intentional, for Carter Creighton well realized that he must be hanged for his crimes as soon as he reached the fort.

Civil law was not in power then, but stern military justice, and when all was known, that he would be quickly and effectively dealt with was not a matter of question.

As he rode along by the side of the negro, he pondered over the past, and bitterly pondered, too. He recalled how he had really loved his sweet cousin, the heiress, Nellie Creighton, while she, knowing him as he was, had never loved him, but instead, had bestowed her affections upon a poor charity student, the son of a clergyman, who, forced to take life in self-defense, had given up his charge, and sought the Far West, where he lived the life of a trapper and hunter, a hermit existence, doing good where he could, but keeping away from his fellow man all in his power.

Left by his father to the cold charity of the world, the student had determined to make a name and fortune for himself, and he went to the head of all his classes, and, a splendid fellow, handsome and winning, he had won Nellie Creighton.

To become his wife she had given up all—home, friends and fortune, and from that day it seemed that adversity had dogged them, for at last they sought a home in the Far West, in the cabin of the Trapper Parson.

Happily they lived together there—the parson, his son and his wife, and the sunshine of all hearts, their child, Wild Rose.

One day the husband, Roy Ripley, left home to go on a long prospecting tour after gold, for he felt he could find it, as he was versed in geological lore and had become a good plainsman.

Then it was that Carter Creighton, a gambler among the mining-camps, found that his successful rival, with his wife and child, had drifted to the very locality where he was a reigning terror among the miners.

He lay in wait for the coming back of his rival, that he might have his revenge.

At length Roy Ripley came along the homeward trail, singing aloud with a glad heart, for he carried in his pocket the map of a locality where he had struck a rich lead, and he felt that fortune had at last come to him.

Suddenly a shot rung out from a thicket bordering the trail, and the miner fell from his horse, while his enemy approached him.

He had received his death-wound, but he yet was able to speak, and he knew his old-time foe.

He implored him to give to his wife and child the map of his mine, and then he died, thinking that the man's hatred was satiated by his death and he would be content to obey his request.

But another had seen the shot and was hastening to the spot. And that other was the Trapper Parson, who was out hunting and had recognized his son.

He charged upon the murderer ere he could rob the dead, and Carter Creighton dropped in his tracks.

Unheeding the man the old parson raised his son in his arms and bore him to his home.

But he was dead, and the shock made his poor wife mad, and then came her death, too, soon following, and the parson and Wild Rose had been left alone.

Time passed on, and one day a stranger saved the parson and Wild Rose from some Indians, and he became a friend at the little cabin from that day.

In him the parson did not recognize the man he had shot down standing over the body of Roy Ripley, for he had never known him in the past and had hardly seen him that day.

He saw in the stranger a man who had served

him well and his grandchild, and whom he knew only as Don, the Monté Man, the great gambler of the mines.

Not knowing that his son had found a mine, the parson had never looked in the pockets of his clothing he had had on when killed; but this Carter Creighton did know, and one day he found the papers, taking them from the coat where it had hung since the day Roy Ripley had been brought home dead.

With this theft, however, his revenge did not end, for he was not one to strike a light blow.

He would kidnap the young girl, Wild Rose, take her with him to the new mine, lead her to believe he was her friend, and break her old grandfather's heart thereby.

When she grew to womanhood and he had dug vast riches from the mine, he would complete his revenge by making her, the child of Roy Ripley and Nellie, his wife.

He carried Rose off one day, telling her that her grandfather had been called East, and he sought the mine, organizing a band of workers under the name of the Knights of the Silver Circle.

But his departure for the wildest mountains of Montana, where lay the mine, had been hastened by an arrival one day at Saw Dust City, of a lady.

She was in deep black, and was singing her way through the mining-camps, for she possessed a marvelous voice.

On account of her sober attire the miners had called her the Black Canary.

Carter Creighton, as Don, the Monté Man, lived at Landlord Bunco's Sinner's Rest Hotel, and he knew the woman, and the recognition caused him to grow white as death.

It was his wife, whom he believed he had sent to the bottom of the sea, and she could be there but for one purpose, to track him.

Landlord Bunco was his friend, and he told him that he must hastily depart, and he did so.

Then it was that he took a part of his organized band and kidnapped Wild Rose, and left others to put the Black Canary out of the way.

She had been on his track, and, with a youth as a guide—who was known in the mines as a waif, and answered to the names of Uncle Solomon and Old Nick's Kid, from his nice face and mischievous pranks—she set out to make a tour of the mining-camps.

Then it was that she was pounced upon by the hirelings of the Monté Man, and the two, Clarice and Nick's Kid, were taken to the mines and held there as prisoners.

Returning to find his child gone, the Trapper Parson had taken her trail and followed her to the mountains, where the trail mysteriously ended at a steep river-bank.

But the old parson would not give it up, but remained there until his food gave out, his ammunition was expended and his clothing was in tatters.

But he made a bow and arrows, lived in a cave, and almost mad, still remained searching for the lost trail.

The Indians said that evil spirits dwelt in the mountains, and they shunned them.

Hunters and miners said the mountains were inhabited by spooks, and they named them the Haunted Mountains, and kept clear of them.

And all this time Carter Creighton, his men, and his prisoners—for Rose was nothing else, though he pretended that her grandfather would yet return, but was detained East on business—dwelt there.

The chief of the Knights of the Silver Circle had trained a snow-white steed and a huge dog, to act as a guide and messenger, and they were sent to and fro among the mountains to Bunco at Saw Dust City, who sent back on the horse, in a pack-saddle, the stores needed.

Thus two years passed, and Buffalo Bill, stationed at a fort several days' journey away, determined to solve the secret of the Haunted Mountains, while Carter Creighton was giving truth to the stories, by having his men play ghosts whenever a stranger approached them.

There Buffalo Bill, as he boldly penetrated them alone, met the Trapper Parson and heard his story, and the scout at once vowed to find the lost trail.

It was a long, tedious task; but, aided by Sergeant Toby and the parson, he took it up and followed it to the end.

In Saw Dust City he had met Deer-Eye Dick, and the handsome boy, a clerk in the store of Red Tom, a desperado, had warned the scout of danger, and then the boy had gone, with the two Chinese, to join Buffalo Bill in the Haunted Mountains.

Lives were lost, and many deeds of daring were done, but Buffalo Bill kept his vow, the lost trail was found, and Carter Creighton was made a prisoner with his men, and the prisoners set free.

For two years Carter Creighton had dwelt there in that weird land, searching for Roy Ripley's mine; but he had lost the key to the map, one of the most important papers, and the secret remained hidden, and they had barely found a pittance in gold, where they had expected riches untold.

Such were the memories that flooded through the brain of Carter Creighton, as he wended his way toward the fort, a prisoner to Buffalo Bill. Thwarted on all sides, with his wife alive and triumphant, with Rose restored to her grandfather, and he a prisoner with his men, he knew the end had come, and that end would be the gallows—unless he could escape.

And so he plotted and planned, and at last forced the scene in the foaming river.

"It is better to drown than hang," he muttered, as he saw his opportunity, and added:

"If I live, I'll have my revenge, and Buffalo Bill comes in for his share of my hatred, for he brought me to this."

And so his horse plunged forward, reared, and threw his rider, who was borne swiftly away.

The bullet of the Chinese cut a gash in his forehead, but it did not kill, and struggling, praying, cursing, the bold swimmer and desperate man at last touched bottom, staggered out of the torrent, and fell his full length, utterly exhausted, upon the mossy bank.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOLD-MINE.

It was the dawning of the third day after the struggle of Carter Creighton for life against the mountain-torrent.

The dawn is just tinting the east with the approaching light and its rays fall upon the form of a man nestling among the branches of a large tree.

He is perched upon a limb and about his body are thongs of leather and a band of cloth to keep him from falling.

His clothes are in tatters, his hair and beard are unkempt and his face is haggard and white.

Rubbing his sunken eyes as the light awakens him from a deep sleep, he looks about him and mutters:

"The dawn is here and I must be on my way."

Then he glances down at the foot of the tree, and shaking his fist at half a score of savage wolves gathered there, and who are whining and snarling in anticipation of a feast, he continues:

"Howl on, you coward brutes, but never will you feast on my flesh until life has left me and I have no strength to go on my way."

"Ha! ha! this day will see me at the Gold Canyon, and then I will be safe."

He began to untie the bonds that kept him from falling out of the tree when asleep, and said, once more addressing the wolves:

"Ha! ha! ha! you howling fiends! I will scatter you like curs when I come down, for I will not die. No! no! I will yet be a gold king and reap a full harvest of the revenge I seek."

As he bound the straps about his waist, he took in his hand a large stick hanging to a limb by a string, and began his descent of the tree, going slowly, for one of his arms appeared crippled.

As he neared the ground the wolves set up a terrific howl, while they widened their circle about the tree.

One animal, as he touched the ground, bolder than the rest, ran in and snapped at the man's legs; but with a sweep of the club the brute was knocked senseless and the pack sprung upon him to whet their appetites upon wolf-meat when they feared to attack the man.

So on the man went, trudging along through valley and plain, over hill and up mountain-side, going straight as the crow flies and following no trail.

And at his heels trotted a pack of wolves, whining, but patient, for they felt that their game was human, that soon he must lie down to die, and then their time would come.

It was his third day since Carter Creighton had struggled ashore from out the torrent and, by his supernatural exertions had saved his life.

He still suffered with the wound received at the time he had surrendered to Buffalo Bill, and the gash of the Chinese's bullet was visible upon his head.

He had only eaten a few nuts he had picked up, and he was worn out and wretched in the extreme.

Without a weapon save his club, in a wild, unknown territory, inhabited only by wild beasts, he had not despaired, but started on his way back to the Gold Canyon he had left, for he had an object in view which the reader will soon discover.

He had cut his belt and coat in pieces, to make straps, with which to tie himself in a tree at night, and showing no fear of the wolves that dogged his every step, waited beneath his perch at night, and kept him untiring company, he went on his way.

A perfect plainsman, he knew which way to bend his steps, and hungry, weary, suffering, but brave and iron-willed he trudged on.

At length a high mountain arose before him. It was wild and rugged in the extreme, and one summit towered far above the others.

"That is Old Beacon, as I named it, and it looks down on the other side into Gold Canyon."

"It is a long, hard climb over the range, but I will reach it by sunset—in fact, I must, for I fear I cannot stand another day of such work, without food, or rest."

He gazed longingly at the high mountain-top, and then started up the steep side, the wolves still at his heels.

It was a desperate climb, but at last, staggering, panting, he sunk down upon the summit.

His eyes gloated over the view spread out before him far beneath his feet.

There were two large canyons, or valleys, piercing the mountain-sides, from the foot-hills a mile beyond the lofty range.

The canyon to the right was like a garden in beauty, and it was walled around by lofty precipices, up which a Rocky Mountain goat could not climb.

At the other end of the valley was the ridge, or foot-hills, and there was a narrow chasm, or pass through it to the large valley beyond.

Tumbling from the lofty range was a stream, falling into the canyon and it flowed directly toward the wall-like ridge that divided it from the canyon on the left, rushing under it through a tunnel it had eaten out, and flowing into a large stream which wound through the second vale.

This one, on the left from where Creighton stood, was a wilder canyon by far, rough, picturesque, however, with its numerous rocks, and, in many parts barren-looking and dreary, in strange contrast to the fertility of the other.

"At last, at last! There lies the Mecca of my hopes, and I am saved!"

"I feel that I must find that mine of Roy Ripley's, though I passed two years in yonder glen hunting for it in vain."

"But, Buffalo Bill, my curse upon him! broke in upon my dream of hope, tore from me the girl, and released that woman, Clarice, whose life, long ago, I should have ended!"

"But he did not find out my secret, that I had a hiding-place for a few arms, ammunition, some food and gold-dust, and I gloated in my heart as we rode away and I knew that I alone knew of it."

"Some strange motive prompted me to hide those things away, for I felt they would come in useful some day—and they have! for, with food and arms I will be myself once more, and this night will I sleep in my deserted cabin."

He arose, to descend the steep mountain-side, knowing that he had yet a hard struggle before him.

He knew that there was but one way of reaching the canyon from where he was, unless by going down the mountain-side, passing around the point of the ridge, and entering through the narrow pass, which was known as The Gate.

This way, to reach the canyon direct, was to go to a rocky point from which a log had been placed into the top of a lofty tree, growing in the valley below.

The tree had been utilized, by his men and himself, in reaching the mountain overhanging the canyon, and rope stirrups had been tied all the way up the mast-like trunk to the branches, by which a person could ascend or descend with comparative ease, if he possessed a cool head.

Then across the space, between the tree-top and the rocky point, lay the large log, the rope having been chopped flat to give a safe foothold.

But several of his men, besides himself, had ever dared attempt the reaching of the ridge by this perilous route, and in fact they had merely arranged it as a means of escape in case their secret retreat should ever be attacked.

To this point, where he could descend by means of the tall pine, was half a mile from where he then stood, and the way was a rugged one.

So he started on his way, made a few steps, stopped, glaring into a sink in the rocks as though he had seen a ghost.

On tip-toe he approached nearer to the spot, while his whole frame quivered, his face flushed and his eyes seemed almost bursting from their sockets.

Nearer and nearer he drew to the spot, a chasm in the rocks, some feet in width, and in which grew a few stunted pines.

But it was not these at which he gazed, for the ridge was covered with them.

A moment he stood staring in the same wild way, and then, with a wild shriek, he sprung into the chasm.

As he crouched there he grabbed up in his hands a large lump of yellow metal.

"Gold! gold! gold! I have found my gold at last, and it shall buy my revenge!"

"Ha! ha! ha! at last! at last!"

"It is all around me, see!" and he held up piece after piece of the precious metal, while he burst out into delirious laughter.

Hugging it in his arms he spoke lovingly to it, as one would speak to an infant, while he cried again and again:

"Mine! all mine! for no human being is within a hundred miles of me."

Then from his lips broke a wild shriek of terror, for a shadow fell into the chasm, and he beheld a man standing over him, a revolver leveled at his heart.

CHAPTER V.

THE LOST MAP.

THE sudden revulsion of feeling, from hope to despair, which was felt by Carter Creighton, upon beholding that he was not the only human being in that wild region, almost crazed his brain and set his heart on fire.

He had accidentally stumbled upon a rich lead of gold, where yellow nuggets actually cropped out of the rocky earth, and he had felt that his sufferings were amply repaid, and that his fortune would know no bounds.

With gold untold, as he believed, in his possession, his thoughts were of those against whom he should be avenged.

He thought not of his wrongs to them, of his cruel crimes, but, having been thwarted, he would seek revenge, and the bitterness in his heart against Buffalo Bill was venomous.

But, while crouching in the rocky pit, clutching the yellow nuggets, his heart gloating with demon-like delight upon his treasure, a shadow had come between him and the sunshine, and he looked up to behold a man standing above him, a revolver covering him.

A moment before he had thought that no human being was within a hundred miles of him, and that all the yellow wealth before him was his; but that shadow falling upon him, that tall form standing there on the ridge, leveling a revolver at his breast, gave his exultant words the lie.

Was it a wonder then that he was appalled, wonder-struck, and that he cringed like a whipped hound before his master, after giving vent to that one wild cry of despair, when he saw that he was not alone?

"Well, Don, the Monté Man, I thought you had been hanged by this time."

The stranger spoke calmly, and in a voice that was full of exultation at the misery his presence evidently caused the one he addressed.

"No, I was not hanged; I escaped, and see! here, Reuben Minor, I have found a fortune—a fortune for you, too, so do not kill me."

He spoke in an excited, hurried tone, as though the pressure upon his brain was too great for him to keep his senses; but his last words were appealing, pitiful in the extreme.

"Do not kill me, Reuben, for remember, I was always good to you, and you were my right bower, my best man. I have struck it rich, and there is enough for us both, and I will share it with you, though I found it."

"Yes; I will share with you my fortune, Reuben, though you turned traitor and led Buffalo Bill into our secret retreat and brought ruin upon me."

A bold-faced young man with some good in it, was Reuben Minor.

He was dressed in mining-attire, his broad-brimmed hat was turned up in front, and he looked like one to use the revolver he held leveled at the now crouching wretch before him; but he slowly returned the weapon to his belt and said:

"I am not one, Captain Don to shoot a man who begs on his knees to me to spare him, and who is unarmed, as I now see that you are."

"I saw you come here and I retraced my way, determined to kill you, for, changed as you are, I knew you."

"And you will not kill me, Reuben?" said Carter Creighton, eagerly.

"No; or if I do, it will be when you face me as man to man and with a weapon in your hand."

"But you say you escaped?"

"Yes."

"I did not deem it possible that a prisoner could escape whom Buffalo Bill had in charge."

"It was the afternoon of the day that you left us, Reuben, after the scout had bade you farewell and told you to change your evil life."

"You rode away, you remember, and our party went on until we came to a swiftly-flowing stream between rocky banks."

"There I made my escape, Reuben, for I urged my horse to rear, threw him backward, and I was swept away, fired upon, wounded here, as you see, and pretended to sink, so that all deemed me dead."

"I reached the shore, crippled as I was, for you remember Buffalo Bill wounded me in my cabin when we were taken, and, half-dead, I dragged my way back to this spot."

"And you have passed three days in these wilds, walked over seventy miles, unarmed, without food, wounded and wretched?"

"I have."

"Then you deserve to live for your pluck and iron nerve, Captain Don," said the young miner, with real sympathy and admiration commingling in his reply.

"I have suffered, Reuben; oh, so much! see! I have this rope, made of my belt and clothing, to tie me in the trees at night, for wolves have dogged my steps continually and are doubtless near now."

"Yes, there are a score of the varmints on yonder ridge now; but, why come you back here?"

"I had nowhere else to go, and I knew that I could find some gold-dust, arms and food, which I had hidden away, and with these I could live,

and make my way elsewhere, while I hoped to find Ripley's gold-mine.

"And see! I have found a gold-mine, a bonanza!" and he clutched his gold nuggets to his heart once more.

"Captain Don, that is not your mine, for it is already the claim of another man."

"No! no! you know that it is not!" cried Creighton.

"Look on that rock at your right and read what is cut into the stone."

The man turned eagerly, and his eyes fell upon lettering rudely cut in the rock, and he read aloud as follows:

"MY CLAIM,

"Found and Staked on

"June 10th, 18—.

"ROY RIPLEY, PROSPECTOR.

"HANDS OFF!"

The date was nearly three years before, and it proved to Carter Creighton that he had at last found the mine that he was in search of.

Strange that he had never, in his search, been to that exact spot, he thought.

The place seemed to have once been the water-bed of a stream, flowing from the mountains towering above, and was a ravine in the rocky ridge, while just where the nuggets were found there appeared to have been a water-wash, or bowl, where a rivulet, from some reason since turned from its course, had flowed there.

That then was Roy Ripley's "find," and certainly he had "struck it rich."

He had cut his claim to it into the solid rock, and then he had started homeward, with "specimens" enough in his saddle-bags to show that he had found a fortune and induce those he loved and others to go there.

He had carefully drawn two maps, one of the canyons and their approach, and one of the ridge, and where to find the mine, so that, should harm befall him, it could be found.

These he had in his inner pocket, when shot down by Carter Creighton, and these the murderer had plotted to secure and did so.

But, by some mischance he has lost one, the one of the ridge, and though he found the canyons, and found gold in small quantities he had not been able to discover the rich deposit the daring prospector had struck on the ridge under the shadow of the lofty overhanging mountain.

"Well, whose gold-pocket is that, Captain Don?" asked Minor calmly, as he saw that Creighton had the evidence which was undeniable as to its proprietorship.

"It is mine, Reuben Minor, and yours," was the quick reply.

"Not too fast, Captain Don, for I am interested also, and represent a partner in the mine."

"Who?"

"The daughter of the finder, Rose Ripley, for she is the rightful heir; and I come next, as I can prove."

"You have no proof," gasped Creighton.

"See if I have not, Captain Don," and he took from his pocket a map and held it up before the man in the ravine.

"It is mine! my lost map, so give it to me!" shouted Creighton, springing from the mine, his face working with passion.

"Back! and not run on certain death," warned Reuben Minor sternly, and he drew a revolver which caused the man to throw up his arms and cry:

"I am unarmed."

"That is why I did not kill you before, Captain Don, and I must say you deserve no mercy, for you tried to rob Rose Ripley of her inheritance, after having murdered her father."

"I knew you to be a gambler, and a desperate one; I knew you to be a man to kill if there was cause; but I did not believe you as bad as the witnesses against you here have shown."

"You said that you had lost a map of the mine, and we tried to find the lead without it."

"One map brought you to the canyons, but without the lost one you could not find the rich lead, and you kept us here for two years, playing ghost to keep others out, and searching all the time."

"You may say I was a traitor, and betrayed you to Buffalo Bill."

"I admit it, and I will tell you why."

"Buffalo Bill found out the secret trail to this place, and one night while I was in the cabin at the pass leading into the Garden Canyon yonder, where you kept your prisoners, the lady and the boy, I was covered by his revolver."

"He knew me as I did him, for I was at the fort where he was chief of scouts, and he knew that I had murdered a man there and cast the suspicion of it upon Sergeant Toby, the negro, who escaped from prison and fled to these mountains, where he met Buffalo Bill."

"You had your way of punishing a member of the Silver Circle League for suspected treachery, by tying him on the back of a hopped horse and turned him loose in the large valley for the rider to become food for wolves."

"This the scout knew, and he offered me the alternative of meeting that punishment, or be-

traying you and the others and having my freedom to go my way as I pleased."

"I accepted the latter, and when I left the party on the trail toward the fort, I returned to this place, to prospect a little for myself."

"In searching over your cabin this morning I saw a paper in a crevice of the wall, and getting it out it proved to be this map."

"With it as my guide it did not take me long to find this ravine, as you may know, Don, and I had been here but a short time when you came up the ridge and I hid just there where you see that rock," and he pointed to a large boulder a few paces distant.

"And you claim the mine?" fiercely asked Creighton.

"I do, and shall share it with the heiress, whom we called our Girl Queen, for, without my finding it she would not have known of her fortune."

"She shall not have an ounce of the dust in this mine," said Creighton, speaking in the same fierce tone as before.

"What have you to do with it?" was the cool query.

"It is mine, and with you alone will I share it."

"Before it shall be otherwise I will rush upon you, Reuben Minor, and risk death from your pistol to strangle your life out."

Minor was a brave fellow, and he did not quail, though he saw that the man really was mad at the finding of the gold, which he now feared he would lose, so he said:

"Captain Don, you claim this mine, and so do I, and there is but one way to settle it."

"Well?" was the eager reply.

"You are unarmed, but I have my two revolvers here, and I will lend you one."

"Then we can go on each side of this ridge, and walk toward each other, firing as we appear over the summit, and the man who survives gets the mine."

"Gladly I agree," almost shouted Carter Creighton, and the look on his face was fiendish.

CHAPTER VI.

A DUEL IN MID-AIR.

"GIVE me the revolver!"

Creighton spoke with an earnestness that showed he was but too anxious to run the risk of death to get his companion out of the way.

But Reuben Minor knew his man, and he did not give him the weapon, but said:

"Captain Don, I may be wicked, but no one yet ever accused me of being a fool, and as I hold the guns you must do as I say, and that I will not be treacherous toward you my actions now prove, as I could shoot you down without mercy."

"It is because I do not wish such a deed on my conscience that I take equal chances with you."

"I am forced to be satisfied. I see no other alternative; it must be a duel to the death, to empty our weapons, and if one falls wounded to keep up the fire until he is dead," eagerly said Creighton.

"Yes; it must be a duel to the death," was the quiet reply.

Then Creighton saw that he had made a mistake.

"If I had only yielded to his views and pretended friendship, I could have killed him any night. I was a fool! But it is not too late to try it now."

With this treacherous resolve he turned to Reuben Minor and said:

"Minor, we are the only two in these mountains, and together we can do much, while we will be company for each other."

"Now I am willing to agree to your terms and give the girl her share, for there will be plenty of dust found here for all of us."

"No," was the decisive and curt response.

"I am not seeking to get out of a bad scrape from fear, but simply see no reason why you and I should fight and perhaps both of us fall, for I shall shoot to kill, I warn you."

"And so will I, and fight we must, for, Captain Don, I would not trust you as a friend."

"Would not trust me?"

"No."

"I do not understand."

"I would not dare close my eyes, for fear you would assassinate me. So it must be your death or mine, and I ease my conscience in giving you a chance for your life equal to mine."

Creighton saw that he was foiled and fully realized his peril. He knew that Reuben Minor was a resolute man and a dead-shot.

For his own nerve, wretched as he was, he had no fear, but he felt that he must act quickly and with deadly effect to avoid being killed.

Then a sudden thought struck him, and his voice quivered with suppressed delight as he said:

"Will you take a position in this duel that I select?"

"How do you mean?"

"You suggested that we should take different sides of the ridge, walk toward each other, and begin firing when our heads appeared above to each other?"

"Yes; that is my plan."

"Will you take another plan—a better one?"

"What is it?"

"You came up here by the pine-tree we call Jacob's Ladder?"

"Yes."

"The foot-log on it is just twenty feet long?"

"True."

"Well, as this must be sure death and no wounding, my plan is that you take your stand at one end of the log, and I at the other, and I will take the tree end, if you wish, and fight our duel there."

"You have some trick in this."

"On my honor, no!"

"Your honor."

"Well, you can insult me, for I am unarmed."

"I will take the chances of a trick and accept your terms, for I am not a man to back down from any one."

"I will take the Jacob's Ladder end, so give me a revolver and let us have it over."

"No, Captain Don, I will not give you a weapon until the time comes for you to use it; so come; we will go to the tree."

They started off together, Carter Creighton foot-sore and weary, but determined, and after a few minutes' walk they reached the point of rocks, which the pine tree grew near.

It was over a hundred feet sheer down, and the branches of the tree arose some ten feet above the cliff, while the main limb on which the log rested was just twenty feet from the rocks.

This log, as I have said, was hewn off flat on top, was a foot in diameter, and required a steady head to cross.

Once the tree was reached, stirrup-ropes were against the trunk all the way down, so that a person could readily descend or ascend, though a misstep would send one to certain death on the rocks below.

Swayed by the wind the tree was wont to move the foot-log on the cliff, which was not made fast at that end.

"Now, Captain Don, here are my weapons. Which one will you select? Both are loaded and in perfect condition," and Reuben Minor drew his two revolvers.

"This one," and Creighton was about to seize one when Minor drew back with the remark:

"No, you are not yet to have it, for I cannot trust you. This one is your choice, so I will place it there by the tree," and he stepped up to the end of the log and walking across with a steady nerve laid the weapon on it where it rested in the crotch of a limb.

Then he returned with equally steady step and said:

"Now let us understand each other."

"Yes."

"If I live, I share this mine with Rose Ripley."

"I shall bury you decently, so as to disappoint yonder pack of wolves who have not yet given up their hope of feasting on you, and all will be well, for me."

"If I die, then you get all; the poor Wild Rose will be cheated out of her inheritance, and you will fall heir to my horse and weapons, and become a gold king."

"I will," was the eager response.

"Well, may the best man live, is my prayer, so now go to your post, and as I see you within five feet of it, I will step upon the log and advance toward you, drawing my weapon only when you place your hand upon yours. Is this fair? Are you satisfied?"

"I am, if you do this."

"If I wished to be treacherous I could kill you now."

"True," and Carter Creighton turned away.

With firm step he walked along the dizzy bridge, and as he reached the tree and seized the revolver he cried:

"Now, sir! the man who lives shall be *The Gold King!*"

As he turned he saw Reuben Minor advancing toward him with quick, steady tread, and their pistols flashed almost together, though one was a second perhaps before the other report.

That second, however, saved the life of Carter Creighton, for his foe had been too generous; a bullet pierced his hair as his finger touched the trigger, and this destroyed his aim.

Carter Creighton heard the bullet whistle by him, saw his foe reel, and then dash downward like an arrow.

He heard the sickening fall, and feeling faint grasped the tree for support.

A moment he stood thus, and then he regained his iron nerve and said with a tone of exultation:

"I am the *Gold King!*"

CHAPTER VII.

AN ARRIVAL IN SAW DUST CITY.

It was Sunday afternoon at Saw Dust City.

The miners were not at work with pick and shovel, except here and there perhaps a rare exception, but had washed up in honor of the Sabbath day, combed their long locks and beards, and congregated at the various taverns and saloons of which that border town was proud.

Saw Dust City was, strictly speaking, a mining-camp.

Gold had been found in paying quantities in

its vicinity, and thither hastened a wild and reckless set of men, bent on making their fortunes, many of them, while others seemed contented with a bare existence, and a few more maybe were in hiding from other localities from which they had fled.

It was located in a vast valley, with hill-land and plain through it, and one large stream winding its way along its entire length.

The spot chosen for the "city" was a good one, for it was convenient to all the surrounding mines in the hills and canyons; and located upon a slight rise, and on the banks of the stream, it was picturesque if not attractive.

A large tavern, called the Sinner's Rest, and not inappropriately so, was the feature of the place.

It had its large saloon and gambling-hall adjoining, on one side, while on the other was a store known as Bunco's Bonanza Palace, in which anything wanted in a border town could be found.

In the rear of the tavern was a livery stable, all under the proprietorship of the landlord, Bunco, a sleek-faced, clerical-looking man, who had grown rich off of the necessities of others, by charging fabulous prices in his hotel, store and stable.

But he had a ranch in the country where he raised things for the tavern, set a good table, gathered about him a set of servants who would fight to the end for their master, who thus wielded a power in the settlement that was far greater than that of any one else.

There had been a gambler—Don, the Monte Man—who had had a big swing in Saw Dust City in his time; but he was a boon pard of Landlord Bunco, and so there was no rivalry between them.

Then Don, the Monte Man, had mysteriously disappeared and had not been seen or heard of since.

Another important personage had been Red Tom, the alleged "boss" of the Bonanza Palace Store; but he had been murdered one night, it was said by his clerk, Deer-Eye Dick, a handsome boy of seventeen, who had disappeared after it.

But these affairs were nearly a year before Saw Dust City is presented to the reader that pleasant Sabbath afternoon.

It was said that after the death of his "right bower," Red Tom, Landlord Bunco made himself scarce for a while, as though dreading trouble for himself; but he soon reappeared, said he had been sojourning at his ranch up in the mountains, getting things there in better shape, and it was not long before he held his old sway once more.

Seated upon his "private piazza," as he called a little portico that jutted out from his own rooms, he was smoking a good cigar after dinner, and enjoying the balmy air that floated down the valley.

Suddenly a horseman rode up and dismounted before the tavern, and at sight of him Bunco arose and met him at the hotel office.

Bunco affected black clothing, and would have been a good model for a country deacon but for the revolvers he wore under his coat-tails and a look of devilry in his otherwise placid face.

That he was a villain, any one who knew how to read the human countenance would decide at once.

The horseman, having thrown his bridle-rein to a Chinese servant, of which there were a number in Saw Dust City, had met the landlord as he would an old acquaintance.

A grasp of the hand, a drink at the bar, and he was led into Bunco's private rooms, adjoining both the office and the store, and with a covered way leading therefrom to the stables, so that the occupant had three ways of retreat opened to him in case they were needed for an emergency.

The "rooms" consisted of one long and large one, and there was more luxury to be found in it than had ever been seen on that part of the border before.

There was a comfortable bed, a lounge, some easy-chairs, book-shelves, a desk and a quantity of bric-a-brac from an Indian tomahawk to statuary.

On the walls were hung several really good works of art, and the room in fact looked like a curiosity-shop.

"Sit down, Buckskin Mose, and tell me the news," said the landlord.

Now Buckskin Mose was a character in his way, and it was a strange way too.

He was a Jew, there was no denying that fact.

He was tall, wiry, had pronounced features, especially the nose, which had caused him to be called at times Buckskin Nose, though the same party did not repeat the cognomen as a joke, as the Jew was not a man to fool with.

His face was cunning, but it was full of daring, and he looked like a man who had courage far beyond the average.

His form, if in a citizen's suit, would have been elegant, for clothed in buckskin it showed fine points of agility, strength and endurance.

He wore a black beard and mustache, his hair was cropped short, and a huge black sombrero covered his shapely head.

From neck to feet he was clad in buckskin,

for he even wore moccasins, and handsome ones too.

A repeating-rifle was slung at his back, and a pair of serviceable revolvers and bowie were in his belt.

"Vel, Boonco, you vas haf a very genteels rooms 'ere, all the same, mine fri'nt," he said, as he glanced about him with admiration.

"Yes, and this is your first visit to Saw Dust City, isn't it, pard?" returned Bunco, who, though often heard to speak without the dialect of the frontier, as often used it.

"Buckskin Mose vas never here before."

"Well, I am anxious to learn just what you discovered for me, for I have been expecting you for a month."

"You see it was slow works going round and finding out t'ings v'at you vants to know. But I has him all rights now."

"And I was sure that you would, when my friend Tucker, in Helena, told me you were the man to put on the trail."

"Vell, I vas go to t'e forts and I finds Puffal. Bulls vas t'e mans dat coomes here as a stranger long ago and makes such troubles for you all t'e times."

"I half suspected it; but then, no one here seemed to know him as Buffalo Bill then."

"Vell, he vas t'e mans, and he comes along so nice, and he gets all t'e news he vants, and den he goes and cleans out Don, the Monte Man, up in the Haunted Mountains, and releases his lady prisoners all right."

"And the Don?" eagerly asked Bunco.

The Jew made a motion across his throat, but said nothing.

"He was hanged, you mean?"

"Vell, dey vas take him to t'e fort a brisoner, and you know what that means."

"Yes; and his men?"

"Vell, some vas let go, and some vas hang, too, I guesses."

"And the Black Canary?"

"She was go East mit t'e old man."

"What old man?"

"T'e Trapper Parson, what they calls him, and his grandchilds, who was haf a pig fortunes left her in her mother's old home in Connecticut States."

"I see; and the parson took the Black Canary with them?"

"Yes; she vas go as governess to t'e young girls, Rose."

"And did you learn aught of Deer-Eye Dick, Red Tom's handsome boy clerk, who fled after killing him?"

"Yes, he went to t'e forts, but did not stay, and nobody was acquainted with him, or where he goes."

"He had better keep away from here, or, boy though he is, the miners will hang him up."

"He petter stays away, den."

"Yes; but now about that other boy, Old Nick's Kid, who went away as guide to the Black Canary?"

"He vas being guides across t'e plains, I hears."

"Now to Buffalo Bill?"

"He vas scouts captains at t'e forts."

"And you think there is no danger of his raiding this town and coming down upon me?"

"No, mine fri'nt, he vas quiet as a leetle pirds."

"Well, Buckskin Mose, I'm downright glad to hear all yer says, for I has not been as happy as I might o' late."

"Yer see, Don and me was great pards, and I thought he hed struck a bonanza up in ther Haunted Mountains, but found he had not secured much dust."

"Then Buffalo Bill lighted in on him, and I feared ther Don might hev squealed on me, and I'd hev some soldiers comin' down on me and all my property would go."

"Maybe you was go up, too," and Buckskin Mose gave that same significant gesture about his throat.

Bunco shuddered and replied:

"I confess I was nervous, for if I can hold on here a year longer I will be rich enough to go East and live like a prince, pard."

"So I went ter see Tucker," he continued, resuming his rough way of speaking, "and he set you on ther trail fer me, and now I feels easy, so jist let me hand yer ther leetle dust I promised yer," and in his happiness Bunco paid over a still larger sum, and then he invited Buckskin Mose to:

"Come out and see ther sights o' ther city, pard."

As they went out upon the ladder that ran along the front of the Sinner's Rest, they saw a crowd of miners gazing up the mountain Overland trail.

"What is it, Sam?" asked Bunco of one of the miners.

"You guess and I gives it to yer, Pard Bunco," was the reply.

There was evidently something unusual coming down the mountain trail, as men were seen to come out of their cabins above and gaze at it as though it were a curiosity.

"It's not ther stage, fer none are due ter-day," said Rum Charlie, the bartender.

"No; and it loks like a herd o' elk, horses, men and dogs," said Bunco.

"We'll soon knows all about it," rejoined Buckskin Mose.

And soon all of Saw Dust City knew, and were excited over the knowledge.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE UNKNOWN.

To say that Landlord Bunco and Buckskin Mose were surprised at what they saw coming up to the door of the Sinner's Rest, would be to "draw it mildly."

They were accustomed to strange sights upon the border, and a true borderman is not apt to show that he is taken by surprise, if such be the case; but there was no hiding the amazement of any one who was near the Sinner's Rest Hotel that Sunday afternoon at what they beheld.

First came two huge dogs, that appeared to be part Russian bloodhound and part St. Bernard.

One was snow-white the other jet-black, and they were as savage-looking as though veritable wild beasts.

Perhaps it was their fierce appearance that caused the miners to keep from having their little fun at the outfit that followed.

After the dogs, that trotted side by side, each wearing a large collar that appeared to be of pure gold, came four large elk, and they were in harness, drawing a light wagon or ambulance.

Their horns were massive and spreading, and they worked perfectly in harness, obeying the draw of the reins as would a horse.

In the ambulance sat the driver, and a remarkable-looking personage he was to the hasty glance people got of him as he went along.

He was dressed in an undress army uniform, the pants being stuck in exceedingly handsome officer's boots, the heels of which were clasped by spurs of gold.

A handsome leather belt, with solid gold buckle encircled his waist, but no weapons were visible in it, his army blouse doubtless hiding them, if there.

His hat was a sable sombrero, with several devices embroidered upon it in gold, and a wreath of gold in leaves encircling it instead of a cord.

The face was, however, the center of attraction of this remarkable personage, for it was a strange one.

The eyes were large and intensely black, the lashes being long in the extreme, which gave them a strange appearance for a man, while they were very black, as were also his eyebrows.

His nose was straight and well-formed, his complexion bronzed, and clear, while, though certainly not over thirty-six years of age, his hair and beard were as white as snow, the former dropping upon his shoulders, and the latter falling almost to his belt.

A nobler-looking person, with his youthful face, handsome as a picture, his superb eyes, and his silver, waving hair and snowy, flowing beard no one would wish to see.

His hands, as he held the reins over the four-in-hand of elk, were incased in gantlet gloves, and he drove with the air of one who was master of the ribbons.

Behind the ambulance, and not hitched to it, were two horses.

One of these was a horse as white as snow, and a magnificent beast, caparisoned with Mexican saddle and bridle of the richest pattern, with lariat at the horn. The ornamental work of the saddle and bridle were of yellow metal, doubtless of gold.

The other animal, a black horse, appeared to be a military charger, and was equally as fine an animal as the white.

His bridle, saddle and trappings were wholly military, and would suit a general office, while they were rich enough in appearance for a prince.

On either side of the saddle-horns was a holster, from which protruded the hilt of a gold-mounted revolver, and both horses, reined back by the reins over the saddle, trotted along with arched necks and proud step.

Bringing up the rear of this odd "outfit," were three outsiders.

They were mounted upon three horses, seemingly selected to suit the color of the rider, for for one was a blood bay, another a jet-black and the third what is known as a claybank, the latter having a silvery main and tail.

Their riders were an Indian in full war-paint and the feathers of a chief, a negro dressed in somber black, and a Chinese in the garb of his country, and the three were mounted respectively upon the bay, the black and the claybank horses.

There was another peculiarity about this trio, and that was that they were all over six feet high, muscular fellows, and their horses correspondingly large.

As they neared the Sinner's Rest, a whistle from the strange driver sent the dogs off at a lively rate, the elk followed, the two riderless steeds kept pace, and the outside trio held their positions some ten paces in the rear.

Drawing rein before the door, the driver sprung out, with an agility that belied his white hair, and threw his reins to the negro, who had already dismounted to run around and receive

them, while the Chinese also sprung from his horse and took position behind the man whom he evidently regarded as his master.

"Waal, I never vos see t'ings like dot," said Buckskin Mose in wonder.

"I'm blessed ef I ever did, either; but, I must go and meet him, and if it was near Christmas I'd sw'ar it were Santa Claus;" and so saying Bunco stepped forward and greeted the stranger with:

"Pard, I'm landlord here, and I gives yer welcome."

Quite a large crowd of miners had gathered around and others were hastening to the scene, and the stranger raised his hat with graceful courtesy and said:

"I thank you, landlord, and I would like to wash the dust from my throat with some of your best; and, gentlemen, do me the honor to let me get acquainted by your joining me in a glass of your favorite beverage."

The last words were addressed, with a smile, to the crowd, who moved, as one man, to form his acquaintance as invited.

"Vell, if he don't vas a king in disguises you may shoots me mit a bowie knives," said Buckskin Mose, as the miners followed the stranger into the bar of Sinner's Rest.

The drinks were taken, the Unknown throwing down upon the bar several gold coins, after which he politely raised his hat and retired with the landlord, to whom he said:

"Now, landlord, I wish quarters for myself and servants, and stable accommodations for my elk and horses, until I can get settled here, for I have come to Saw Dust City to live."

"How many servants have you, sir?" asked Bunco.

"Three, my Chinese, the negro and the Indian."

"Vas dot Injines your servants, mine fri'nt?" asked Buckskin Mose, who had kept close to Bunco.

"Yes, he is."

"Vell, if you haf make a Ingines work you vas do more den anybody's I know among beobles," declared Mose bluntly.

The Unknown smiled, but answered quietly: "My servants obey me, sir, one and all, and did I tell them to toss you out of that door they would do it."

"Mine fri'nt, I don't vas interdoosed to you yet, put my name vas Puckskin Moses, and when you knows me petter as now, you will not let your servants commit suicides by telling them to puts me out dat door."

The stranger glanced at Buckskin Mose silently, seemed to take his measure from head to foot, and apparently read him aright, for he answered:

"I shall not tell them to commit suicide, my friend, unless you force me to do so," and turning to Bunco he continued:

"Now, landlord, can you accommodate us?"

"Yes, sir, I kin."

"It will only be for a short while, as I have come here to buy a mine I hear is for sale, and shall build there."

"What mine is that, pard, fer thar is no mine fer sale here now?" remarked Bunco.

"It is a mine that has been fatal to its purchasers, I have heard, as three have lost their lives who owned it, and a boy, who took up his quarters there, because it was deserted, disappeared mysteriously."

"Ah, that boy was Old Nick's Kid, and a terror he was, too, while the diggings you refer to was what we calls The Sudden Death Mine."

"Yes, landlord, that is it."

"Waal, you is too late, stranger, ter tackle thet, as Devil Dan has located there, jist one week ago, and he won't surrender."

"Indeed! and who is this Devil Dan?" asked the Unknown, smilingly.

"He's a man as hes got more graves corraled up in Sinner's Hope Cem'tery, on ther hill yonder, than any three men in Saw Dust City, now thet Ther Triplets hes been wiped out by Buffalo Bill."

"Ah! he's what you would call a terror?"

"That's it, pard, and he's like the mine, sudden death ter fool with."

"Well, I came here to get that mine, landlord, and I shall carry out my intention, so just send for this Devil Dan, and tell him to come prepared to give up his mine, or it will prove sudden death to him as it has to others," and the Unknown smiled as serenely as before, while those crowding about him drew a long breath as some one called out:

"Here comes Devil Dan now!"

But the Unknown did not change a muscle, as the crowd gave back for a tall, powerfully-built man to pass in, and who asked in a tone of menace:

"What's wanted o' Devil Dan, for I'm thet pilgrim?"

CHAPTER IX.

A MAN OF METTLE AND METAL.

THE history of the mine, to which had been given the name of "Sudden Death," was a strange one.

It had been one of the first discovered in or near Saw Dust City. It was upon the summit of a hill, behind which rose a lofty mountain.

The hill jutted out just where the mine was, so that a view up and down the valley could be had from there, while Saw Dust City was visible a few hundred feet below.

Only a narrow roadway led up to the slope on one side, and this was the only means of reaching the entrance.

The first owner it was said "struck it rich" there; but his good fortune ended by his death soon after in an encounter with a brother miner.

Another took possession and worked it, building a large and substantial cabin on the space in front of the cavern-like opening—around which were a couple of acres of level ground, edged by the cliff that overhung the river flowing through Saw Dust City.

This second miner's hold on the property was also brief, for, one day he fell over the cliff and was killed.

But, a third was found who would risk its fatality. Seeing the cabin door closed all one day, several miners went up to find out the cause, when the new-comer was discovered lying on the floor, a knife-wound through his heart.

After this the mine was deserted, until a waif of the camps, a boy of sixteen, whom the reader met in the cavalcade headed by Buffalo Bill at the time of Carter Creighton's escape, boldly took up his abode in the cabin, though he did not work the mine.

His mysterious disappearance, when he rode away from the Sinner's Rest one evening, as a guide for Clarice Creighton, convinced the denizens of the valley that the Overlook Mine, as it had been called, on account of its locality, was more deserving the title of the Sudden Death Mine.

Still a fifth person had at last been found to risk its possession, and this was the man known as Devil Dan.

He had been working in the mines near Saw Dust City for some time with ill-fortune, and had been a very popular man withal.

At last he struck a lead one day and soon had a snug little fortune laid up, and intended to start home with it, when he was tempted to play cards to win more.

Instead of winning he lost, for Don, the Monté Man, was his tempter, and in a week he was almost penniless again.

With his mine worked to bed-rock, and his money gone, he took to drink, and it was not long before he became noted as the worst desperado in the camps, while his great strength, deadly aim and cruel use of his bowie caused him to be feared by many, and shunned by those who did not fear him, yet wished to avoid trouble.

Among his last high-handed acts was to go up and take possession of the Sudden Death, and when remonstrated with by a young miner whose real property it was, but who offered it for sale, fearing to work it himself, he had shot him dead, and so remained master of the situation.

It was with feelings of the deepest interest then, that the miners heard this new arrival, this unknown personage, say that Devil Dan must surrender the mine, and all looked forward to a meeting between the claimants that could add another to the fatality list of the property.

Of course, knowing Devil Dan as they did, the miners of Saw Dust City could expect but one termination to an affair between him and the stranger, and that, the death of the latter.

The courtly manners, distinguished appearance, and evident generosity of the Unknown, in treating all present at his arrival, had caused the crowd to take an interest in him, and wish to see and know more of him, and they felt real regret that he would be cut off so suddenly by Devil Dan's bullet.

But the smile of the Unknown did not change as Devil Dan insolently advanced toward him, and made himself known by his remark.

It was hardly a pleasant smile, Buckskin Mose thought, as he diagnosed it, and he said to Bunco, who stood near:

"Dot mans vos smile like a tiger showing his teeth, don't it?"

"I'd call it a dangerous smile, Buckskin. I would; but ther music is about ter begin, for Devil Dan is in tune," returned Bunco, and all eyes turned upon the Unknown, who said, calmly:

"Did you say your name was Devil Dan?"

"That's it, so what might your name be?" was the insolent response.

The two men stood some ten feet apart, and a lane of humanity was upon either side of them, the miners having instinctively placed themselves out of range, as experience had taught them not to get behind a man in a difficulty.

But the large Chinese stood like a statue behind his master, and his face was emotionless, though his dark eyes evidently took in all there was to see.

The tall, sinewy miner was dressed in a red shirt, black pants and a gray slouch hat, and he carried a revolver upon either hip, while a strap that crossed his breast, and was attached to his belt, held a scabbard in which was a bowie-knife with a very long blade.

Devil Dan stood bolt upright with his thumbs thrust in his belt, so that in an instant he could

drop his hands upon his revolvers or grasp his knife.

The stranger stood before him with that smile which Buckskin Mose did not like.

His shoulders were broad, his waist small and his form elegant, while his white hair, dropping upon his shoulders, and his long beard gave him a most striking appearance.

A heavy gold chain was about his neck and attached to a large watch that was thrust into a fob under his belt, while, as he now had his gauntlet-gloves off, massive bands of gold were upon the four fingers of his right hand, while upon the little finger of his left was a diamond *solitaire* of immense size and great beauty.

The buckle of his belt was of gold and heavy, but no weapon was visible as he stood facing the desperado, his gauntlet-gloves held in his hands in front of him.

As the stranger did not instantly reply to his question, the desperado said:

"I told yer my name was Devil Dan and I'm ter let; so tell me your name if you hain't ashamed of it."

The answer came in a low but distinct tone, so that all heard it, for a silence like death reigned in that wild crowd:

"I have no name, pard, and am wholly unknown here and elsewhere."

"You are a stranger here?"

"I am."

"What are you doing here?"

"I came for my own pleasure."

"Going to stay here?"

"Yes; I came to stay."

"What's your biz?"

"My pleasure."

"You don't intend to mine, then?"

"Yes; I came here to take possession of a mine, which I may work or not, as pleases me."

"What mine has you in yer eye?"

"The Overlook."

And the reply was given in the same calm tone.

"Yer mean the Sudden Death Mine?"

"Yes; I believe it is also so called."

"Well, stranger, that is *my* mine."

And Devil Dan spoke in a voice that rung out loud and threatening.

"Só I learned, and I would like to buy it of you," was the cool reply.

"I'll not sell it."

"You must."

"Must? Did you say that I *must* do that which I do not want ter do?"

"I did say just that."

And again the crowd drew their breath as one man, for they saw that the stranger was a calm but fearless man.

"Well, I say I won't sell it," shouted Devil Dan.

"If you will not sell it you must get out, for I am determined to have it."

Devil Dan was nonplused at the words of the stranger.

His face worked violently, his hands twitched nervously, as though itching to grasp his revolvers, and his face grew livid with passion, while he turned to one side and then the other, and said:

"Say, pards, some of you tell this pilgrim just who I am, for he don't know me."

"I do know you for a blustering bully and coward," came the startling response in the same quiet tones.

The words fell upon Devil Dan like an electric shock, for he started, made a step forward, dropped his hands upon his revolvers, and said hoarsely:

"Stranger, you said you had come here ter stay, and you war right, for your grave is as good as dug—look out!"

With his warning cry Devil Dan's revolvers were leaving their holsters, when, suddenly, the stranger threw one hand upward, the one holding his gauntlet gloves, and then followed a flash and crack of a pistol.

It was the death-knell of Devil Dan.

CHAPTER X.

BUCKSKIN MOSE MAKES A PURCHASE.

THE gloves which the Unknown had been observed to be twisting in his hands, were not supposed to be dangerous, by the crowd, and certainly not by Devil Dan.

They were buckskin gauntlets, and had been drawn off by the stranger when he stepped up to the bar. He had held them in his hand, in a natural manner, until his talk with the desperado, when he had stood with his hands dropped in front of him, each one grasping the gauntlets.

All wondered why the Unknown made no effort to place his hand upon a weapon, for all felt that Devil Dan had him at his mercy and meant to be merciless, but when they expected to see the Unknown a dead man, his right hand suddenly shot upward, still holding the gloves, and the report had followed.

The report was a loud, ringing one, and several cried out:

"He fired a derringer!"

But the bullet went to the center of Devil Dan's forehead, and he dropped like a log in his tracks, his revolvers, which, quick as he was, he had not been able to use, falling from his hands,

"Landlord, see to the remains, please, and I'll stand all expenses."

"Come, gentlemen, let us plead at the bar again."

The Unknown's manner was as suave as before, not a trace of excitement about him, and without a glance at the dead miner, he led the way to the bar.

The crowd was not boisterous, for something in the dignified manner of the stranger forbade a hurrah over his act, and they spoke in low tones and gazed in admiration upon him.

They had had a hero come into their midst, and they were proud of him, evidently.

Buckskin Mose did not follow the stranger to the saloon, but the big Chinnee did, keeping close behind his master.

"Pard Boonco, did you vas see dat Chinnee niggers?" asked Mose.

"Yes."

"Vell, he was a pansie plossom, for he didn't vas move ven t'e strangers shootet Devil Dans."

"No, he did not get out of ther range o' Dan, I seen."

"No, he seems to feels dat t'e strangers vas all right."

"He did indeed."

"He has seen him shot pefore."

"Sure."

"And them gloves! Oh, my! I wish I haf some gloves like dose vot shoots right off quick."

"That stranger is ther boss, Mose."

"He vas, and I vil like to know somet'ings apout him; but vat vas dat mines he talks of taking so pretty?"

"The mine pays, I am sure, for those who have worked it have found more pay-ore than they would admit; but it belongs to a young miner here, whose uncle found it, and left it to him, only the boy got skeert and wouldn't work it; so he offere it for sale, but them as wanted ter try went and tackled it, not caring for ther young feller at all."

"What vas t'e names of t'e young mans, Boonco?"

"Buck Bradford. Come to the door and I'll show you his shanty if you wish to see him."

"I do, put I don't vant noddings said apout it, Boonco."

"That's all right, Mose," and having had his servants remove the body of the dead desperado, who was to be buried from the Sinner's Rest, for a funeral from that hotel was a card in its favor, Bunco stepped to the door and pointed out the hut of the young miner, who had inherited the ill-omened mine.

With a long, swinging step Buckskin Mose went along down through the camps, and at length reached the little cabin of Buck Bradford.

The young miner and his pard were just sitting down to supper when Mose came up, and they eyed him curiously.

Buck Bradford was hardly over twenty-one, a strapping, handsome young fellow, and his comrade was a good deal like him, from his general look and frank-faced appearance.

"Hello, pard, jist in time ef you'll have a bite with us, for you seem to come right here as though you meant to make a visit," called out Buck Bradford, as Buckskin Mose came up.

"I vas looking for Puck Pradford's, mine fri'nt, if he lifs here."

"I'm that pilgrim, pard, so how can I serve you, or will you eat first?" answered the miner with real frontier hospitality.

"I vas t'anks you, mine fri'nt, put I haf promise to come pack for mine suppers."

"Put I comes here to ask you if t'e Overlooks Mine vas for sales?"

"It is, and I'll be glad to get rid of it, for I'd never work it if I went poor without it."

"You don't t'inks dere vas mooch golt dere?"

"There is sudden death there to whoever buys it, so if you have a mind to invest, don't do it, though I wish to sell."

"You vas honest apout it."

"I try to be square as life here will let me be, and my pard here, Hank Holden, does, too, don't we, Hank?"

"Yes, but we is sickers all ther same, though saints among others, I know. But, mister, if you buy that mine you'll regret it," answered Hank Holden.

"Vell, I vants to puy t'e mines."

"Fact is, I cannot give you a clear title, as there is a squatter in it now, and he's lightning on a racket."

"His name is Devil Dan, and he's Satan clean through."

"He took up his quarters there, and he gets gold out of it."

"Of course I could get into a row with him, and perhaps my pard here and me could get away with him; but one of us would have to go, for we know Dan, and he wouldn't die alone; so I let him hold on, and if I sell, the buyer will have to oust Dan."

"I vill do dot, mine fri'nt."

"Do you know Dan?"

"I vos see him, and he vos a terror jist row up at t'e Sinner's Rest."

"On a racket?"

"Vell he vas quiet ven I left him; but vat vill you sells me t'e mine for?"

"You think you will risk a row with Devil Dan?"

"I risk him all right."

"You look game."

"I vas more gamer as I looks."

The young miners laughed, and Buck Bradford replied:

"Well, give me five hundred cash for the property, and it's a bargain."

"I vill do so, mine fri'nt, so vot bapers haf you dot you own t'e mine?"

"Here is the deed of it to me, written by my uncle, who brought me out to the mines with him, years ago."

"Those who have gone there since his death, to work it, have had no right to do so."

"Now I will make the transfer to you, and Hank can witness it."

"Dot vas all right, mine fri'nt. Put me down as Puckskin Mose, a Jew."

"I see."

"And I vas vants you, both of you, mine fri'nts, to say noddings apout t'e puying of t'e mine by me."

"Let beoples say vot dey vishes, and other beoples take holt of t'e mine, put don't you say noddings as to me having pought it, and I vill keep my mouth tight shut all t'e times."

"I'll say nothing about it, pard, if you don't wish it known, and my comrade here will keep dark, too, I guess," answered Buck Bradford.

"I'll do it," was the response of Hank Holden, and the papers were then handed over, the two young miners signed their names, as late owner, and witness to the sale, and Buckskin Mose counted out his money and gave it to Buck Bradford, who said:

"Just so much in, am I, pard; but, I'll bid you good-by, as I won't expect to see you alive again, and Hank and me will go to yer funeral."

"I vas not no dead beoples, mine fri'nt; I vas live folks," replied Buckskin with an earnestness that made both of the miners laugh.

"Well, but you will be killed if you interfere with Devil Dan," declared Hank Holden.

"Yes, and we'll see you planted in the best of style."

"Not mooch, mine fri'nt; but I forgits to tell you dot Tuyvil Tan was to be buried soon."

"Ah! you going to kill him?" asked Buck Bradford.

"He vas already kilt."

"What!" and the two miners sprung to their feet in amazement.

"I tells pefore dot I leaves him very quiet, and I tells you now dat he vas deat."

The two young men looked at each other in surprise, and then at Buckskin Mose.

"Did you kill him?" asked Bradford.

"No, but I vas saw him turn up his toes most peautiful."

"Who killed him?"

"Von man as I vas not acquainted vid; put vas a pansie plossoms and don't you vas forgit it."

"How many did Dan kill first?"

"It vasn't his day to kill beoples."

"And you do not know the name of this man?"

"No."

"You are a stranger here?"

"Yes."

"Where from?"

"I vas from roundupout mostly, mine fri'nt."

"I see, and you have come here to mine?"

"No, I vas come here to puy t'e Sudden Death Mines, and I haf done so; put I vas go away again, and t'e man as kilt Tuyvil Tan vill take t'e mines and vork it."

"Then he is your friend?"

"No, I don't vas know him; but I vill let him haf t'e mines and say noddings, until I gits ready to vork it myself, so I don't vant you to say noddings, too, and ve vill see vat ve vill see, somedimes."

"Well, you interest us in this stranger who has killed Devil Dan, and we will go back with you to the Sinner's Rest," said Buck Bradford, while Hank Holden rejoined:

"Yes, we will return with you, Buckskin."

"No, you vas return mit your two selves, for I vas don't know you, don't you see, and vants nopodys to see me vid you, as t'e puying of t'e mines vas a secret."

"I understand; so we'll go by ourselves," was the reply, and Buckskin Mose started on his return to the hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

TROUBLE BREWING IN SAW DUST CITY.

AFTER the death of Devil Dan, at the hand of the remarkable stranger, who had put in an appearance at Saw Dust City, the quiet of the Sabbath afternoon was broken, and the camps became quite excited.

The huge negro and the Indian had taken their elks, dogs and horses to the stables, and the Chinnee had placed his master's room in the best condition for his reception.

The miners visited the stables, examined the elks, admired the splendid horses, eyed the large and ferocious dogs askance, and asked questions of the Indian and negro, not one of which was answered.

The body of the dead desperado was also visit-

ed, the wound directly between his eyes being critically examined and the deadly aim of the mysterious marksman commented upon admiringly.

After his supper the Unknown mounted his black horse, and, followed by the white dog, rode away to have a look at the camps and the Sudden Death Mine.

He was the only guest whom Bunco had ever entertained that he stood in awe of, and from some reason he did feel subdued in the presence of this stranger, and saw him ready to ride away without daring to ask him whither he was going.

As the Unknown mounted he called out to Bunco:

"Landlord, where lies the Overlook Mine?"

"Yonder on that point, sir, under the mountain light."

"You turn, after you cross the river, directly to the right," called out Bunco, glad to give the information.

The stranger bowed and rode away, and then he became the talk of the hundred or more men gathered in and about the Sinner's Rest.

Down through the camps he rode, meeting miners who were hastening to the hotel, for the news of his coming and killing of Devil Dan had spread, and he was gazed at with interest by all.

He seemed not to note the presence of any one, crossed the stream and rode directly toward the mine, going there as though he was really familiar with the right trail, for he made no inquiry, more than he had of the landlord, made no mistake and soon rode up in front of the cabin.

The view of the camps of Saw Dust City, running for some three miles along the valley, and following the stream, seemed to attract his attention, and then his eyes fell upon the well-dotted cemetery of Sinner's Hope upon the hill beyond the Sinner's Rest Hotel.

Having enjoyed a long survey of the grand scenery spread out before him, he turned to the cabin.

The door was unlocked, the key being in the padlock.

The cabin was larger than was the wont of most of those in the valley, substantially built, had two windows in either end and one on each side of the large door.

It was built close against the wall of rock that towered behind it, and there was considerable space on the hill or plateau which broke off abruptly at the river.

There was an outbuilding which was doubtless used as a stable, and grass enough to keep a horse grew along the mountain base.

But one trail led up to the cabin, as before stated, and seeing this the stranger said aloud:

"Half a dozen men could hold this place against all of Saw Dust City."

Opening the door he saw that it opened into a hallway which ran back to a cave in the mountain-side, and doors opened into the rooms upon either side.

This cavern was the mine, and in it had been discovered a vein of ore, the diggings of rock and dirt being brought through the hallway and thrown out upon the edge of the cliff overhanging the river.

Seizing a lantern which hung in the doorway, the stranger went back to the mine and gazed about it with the air of one who knew what he was about.

Then he entered one of the four rooms in the cabin.

It was used as a lumber-room, and there were picks, shovels, lanterns and a few odds and ends useful to a miner.

The room next to it was evidently the living-chamber of Devil Dan, for there was a bunk-bed, table, a fire on the broad hearth, some fire-arms and a few cooking utensils.

Across the hall were two large rooms wholly vacant.

Having concluded his search, the stranger walked out, mounted his horse, and the dog going ahead, he started upon his return.

Instead of going directly back to the hotel he made his way up the broad trail leading to Sinner's Hope Cemetery.

It was picturesque, situated upon a hill overlooking the camps, and a rude fence had been built around it.

There were very many head-boards, rudely painted, and upon which had been carved rudely or lettered the name of the dead beneath, with a word as to whether he had "shuffled off this mortal coil," with his boots on or not.

Some of the head-boards were simple boards, others in cross shape, a few oddly cut by some ingenious hand with a knife, and a number unmarked.

Riding into the inclosure the Unknown gazed about him with deep interest. He saw a

"CHINEE BONE GARDING,"

as one plot was marked, and a tea-chest surmounted the grave of one heathen among those buried there, showing that he had at least some one to remember him.

Another plot was labeled as

"THER TRIPLETS' BONE CORRAL."

In this there were eleven graves, and a twelfth was dug, and its yawning mouth appeared to

have been opened by the spade long before, as it was weather-worn; but no occupant had filled it.

The graves were four in a row, and names were above each, with the legend on each of the slayer, whether he was one of the desperado three known as The Triplets, who answered to the names of Long, Short and Stumpy.

Another grave had a head-board bearing an inscription:

"FRANK FANSHAW,
A Stranger Pilgrim Lies Here.
He come ter Saw Dust City
Ter run ther town,
and
Got run inter this hole by
A Stranger,
Who were suspected of bein'
BUFFALO BILL."

"Buffalo Bill? Well, some day I will meet him, and then—" muttered the Unknown, as he rode on to a spot where there were no graves.

Getting down from his horse he said:

"This will suit me," and with some stones he marked out a space about twenty feet square.

Then he mounted once more and rode back to the Sinner's Rest Hotel, arriving just at dark.

A hush fell upon the crowd as he entered, for, somehow, that white-haired man strangely impressed them.

Bunco met him obsequiously, and the Unknown said:

"Landlord, I saw the mine, and shall take possession to-morrow, so shall need to call on your store for a goodly amount of supplies."

"Certainly, sir, certainly; but will you give me your name for my register, please?"

"Put me down as Unknown," was the reply.

"Yes, sir, yes, colonel, I will, colonel—"

"I am no colonel, landlord, so don't call me so."

"No, col—I mean, no, sir, no, sir."

"And, landlord, I went up to your burying-ground and selected me a lot."

"Indeed, sir!"

"Yes, I marked off with stones a plot twenty feet square, and—"

"Holy Moses! vas you goin' ter shoot ther towns?" asked Buckskin Mose, who was standing near.

"I hope I shall not have to," was the smiling reply.

"Vell, I vasn't von of t'e towns, mine fri'nt; I was only a poor Jew."

The Unknown looked at Buckskin Mose in a queer way, and he made no reply, but he remembered that the Jew had had something to say to him before, and there was just the shadow of a suspicion in the stranger's mind that he wished to draw him into trouble with him.

So, making no reply to Buckskin Mose, he said to Bunco:

"Landlord, I wish my game of this afternoon buried in my lot up in the cemetery, and the grave dug just in the center, so there will be room for others around him."

"Please see to it that he gets a good send-off, and let me know the costs and I will pay them."

"A night-cap, gentlemen, with me, before I retire."

The crowd accepted with alacrity, all except Buckskin Mose, and then the Unknown sought his room, while the miners congregated and discussed him the more.

"Who is he, Bunco?" asked Buck Bradford, who, with Hank Holden, was present.

"I don't know, pards, any more than you does," was the answer.

"He looks like an army officer," Hank Holden remarked.

"Yet when I called him *colonel* he said it was not his title."

"And he drives elk—has a nigger, a Chinese and a Injun for servants, with some of the finest horses I ever seen, and two dogs that can't be beat," a miner remarked.

"He's a mystery ter me, I owns up," the landlord added.

"He's game, clean through."

"He's a dead shooter."

"Cool as ice in summer time."

"Thet smile o' his means wickedness."

"He's got plenty o' dust."

"Yas, he's got gold ter throw to ther birds."

"He intends ter takether Sudden Death Mine, too."

"Well he does!"

"And he's started his graveyard with Devil Dan."

"And made it big enough to accommodate more."

"Yas, twenty squar' feet will accommodate jist thirty stiffs, if ther partitions atween ther graves is thin," said one who had made an arithmetical calculation upon his fingers.

"Vell, he oughter haf left t'e middle place for himself, for maybe he somedimes gits kilt," and with this remark Buckskin Mose turned away from the group.

"Who is that man, Bunco?" asked Buck Bradford.

"A friend of mine from the settlements."

"Ah! Is he going to live here?"

"Oh, no; he only came down on a little business for me."

"And what do you sa, to the Unknown taking

the mine, Buck?" asked a miner, who was one of the group in the bar-room.

"Pard, that mine is known as the Sudden Death, and if any one wishes to keep up its reputation by working it, he's welcome to do so," was the reply.

"Well, somehow I feel that that elegant stranger must pass in his chips soon," observed a new speaker.

"There's one he hes ter settle with fer killin' Devil Dan," a miner remarked.

"Who's that?" came in a chorus of voices from the group gathered about the table where sat Bunco, Buck Bradford, Hank Holden and several others.

"It's Bowie Ben."

A hush followed the name, and then Buck Bradford remarked:

"I had forgotten about him, as it has been so long since he was here."

"He comes twice a year, as yer know, from some mine he works and the locality of which he keeps all to himself," said Hank Holden.

"Yes; he is a firm friend of Devil Dan."

"Dan saved his life once, when the Vigilantes had him, yer remember, and was about ter hang him for a road-agent?"

"Yas; and when Bowie Ben was here last and knew Devil Dan was in hard luck from having lost his money he paid his debts and staked him as I know," declared Bunco.

"Bowie Ben is a bad man, pards, and I'd rather have Devil Dan arter me than him," a miner added.

"Yas; he throws one o' them half-dozen Bowie-knives he carries as straight as he sends a bullet."

"He's a terror, pards, and when he comes thar'll be music in these camps, fer he'll git even with that stranger fer killin' Devil Dan."

"Who killed Devil Dan?" cried a deep voice, as a tall man suddenly entered the saloon door and confronted the group.

A score of voices cried out in chorus:

"Bowie Ben!"

"Yes, pards, I'm Bowie Ben, and if any man has killed my comrade, Devil Dan, he must answer to me," was the stern response of the man who had just come in.

CHAPTER XII.

BOWIE BEN.

THE man who had so unexpectedly entered the bar of the Sinner's Rest had certainly carried out the old saying, "Speak of the devil and his imps will appear," for his name was upon the lips of the group of miners as he entered.

He was tall, muscular-looking in physique, dressed in buckskin leggings, a woolen shirt and black slouch hat.

In addition to two revolvers, one worn on either hip, he carried a pair of long bowie-knives upon either side in front and one in a pocket in his shirt on his right and left breast.

These six bowies had given him the prefix of Bowie to his name of Ben, and he was never known to use a revolver where he could make a knife serve as well.

His face was bearded, bronzed and very resolute, while his eyes were piercing and jet-black.

The man was something of a mystery in Saw Dust City, for he had been one of the first miners there, and in the daily quarrels and encounters he had proven himself a bad person to get into a difficulty with.

He had never forced an encounter, but if drawn into one he had never retired from it until the trouble was settled.

On a prospecting tour in the mountains one day, he had been overhauled by a band of Vigilantes, and, after a desperate fight was taken.

Wounded as he was he would have been strung up, had not Devil Dan—then known as Honest Dan, for it was before his taking to drink and cards—come up and boldly faced the captors of his friend.

He knew the Vigilantes as men from a distant settlement, told them that Bowie Ben was not the man they were in search of, as a road-agent, and offered to remain as a hostage in their hands until they went to Saw Dust City and found out that he told the truth.

They saw that Dan was a bad man at bay, and being in doubt themselves, as to having captured the right person they went away, leaving the wounded man alone with his friend.

It was miles from Saw Dust City, and a rough trail to get there.

Bowie Ben had been out prospecting, while Devil Dan was hunting for game.

But the latter raised the wounded man in his arms, strapped him on his back, and set out for camp.

Slow, wearying, terrible was the journey with the heavy load; but Dan struggled on, and after several hours reached the camps and thus was the life of Bowie Ben saved.

It was several months before Bowie Ben got out again, but all that time Dan had been his devoted nurse.

Bowie Ben was a man of few words, and seemingly of no friendships.

He went to his little cabin again, when he got well, for Dan had carried him to the Sinner's Rest, and every Sunday he was won't to call on his rescuer and remain an hour.

When Dan fell from grace and went to the bad, Bowie Ben tried to save him, but doing no good he had left Saw Dust City and gone off by himself.

That he had found a mine somewhere, and "struck it rich," was evident, as twice he had come to Saw Dust City with plenty of gold to get rid of, and on two occasions he had paid Devil Dan's debts and given him a good sum to start anew with.

But the visits of Bowie Ben to Saw Dust City were few and far between, and knowing his friendship for Devil Dan, bad as he was, the miners had predicted trouble when he did come.

A hush fell upon the party at the bold words of Bowie Ben.

They were just what the miners had expected, and they knew he was not a braggart, or a man to make an idle threat.

There are in all gatherings of lawless men, certain leaders who hold immense sway.

It may be from fear, in some, it may be because he is a bully, but still men dread an encounter with him, or to anger him.

Because a man avoided him, it was no sign that he was a coward, or feared him, for there were various reasons why some wished to keep clear of all difficulties.

Bowie Ben had the reputation of never seeking trouble, and yet, if forced upon him, he acted promptly and with the deadliest result.

He was a man to fear, if armed, and he was one who had proven his friendship for Devil Dan.

Fanshaw, who lay in his grave up in Sinner's Hope burying-ground, had been a "terror" in Saw Dust City.

He had gone the way of all flesh, and three there had been like him, "The Triplets," who had gone off on the trail of Buffalo Bill, it was said, and had never returned.

Room Key Johnny, a former clerk at the Sinner's Rest, and a desperado, had disappeared, with a brother bully, while also following a trail of revenge, and thus a number of the worst characters had been gotten rid of.

Still, others were ready to step into their places, and Saw Dust City was threatening to organize a Vigilante band, build a church and become civilized, just about the time that the Unknown had put in an appearance.

In killing Devil Dan he had saved future Vigilantes trouble, that was certain; but, with the arrival upon the scene of Bowie Ben, it began to look as though Sinner's Hope on the hill was to have another occupant.

Would it be the Unknown or Bowie Ben? was the question of the hour in Saw Dust City.

"Sit down, Bowie Ben, and take su'thin'," said Landlord Bunco, and a chair was brought for the miner, who dropped into it, dashed off a glass of liquor and replied:

"I just told your clerk to give me a room, Bunco, for I'm to stop with you for a few days; but what's this I hear about Devil Dan being killed?"

"Oh! he's been raisin' Old Nick o' late, but tackled the wrong pilgrim this arternoon, and got it in ther brain," explained Bunco.

"Who was the pilgrim?"

"I give it up, but he is a team."

"I didn't ask what he was, Bunco, but who he is?"

"He vas a pansie plossom, mine fri'nt," put in Buckskin Mose who had joined the party.

Bowie Ben looked up quickly at the speaker and asked with a sneer:

"And what and who are you?"

"I vas a poor Jew, mine fri'nt, and I vas also what you vill never be."

"What is that, Jew?"

"A shentilmans," was the calm reply.

"Hal! do you—"

"Hold on, mine fri'nt, for I has you all cornered up mit my bistols, and if I has to kill you, you vill not pe aples to kill t'e pilgrim vat kill Tuyvil Tan."

Buckskin Mose did have his weapon covering Bowie Ben, and no one realized the fact more than the man at whose head it was leveled.

The crowd fell back with alacrity, while all eyes were turned upon the Jew, who, serene as a May morn, and with a hand as firm as a rock held his position.

"Hold, pards! you don't wish trouble."

"Come, Mose, this is my friend Bowie Ben, as squar' a man as ever lived; and, Ben, this is Buckskin Mose, a pard of mine, and true as steel."

"Drop yer weepens and shake!" and Bunco arose between the two men, laying a hand upon the shoulder of each.

"I shoots, or shakes jist as t'e shentilmans vants, for I vas a most accommodating Jew," announced Buckskin Mose in an indifferent way, while Bowie Ben replied:

"Then shake let it be, this time, pard, and maybe it will be shoot when we get better acquainted—but who is that?" and, as he grasped the hand of the Jew his eyes fell upon one who had just entered the room, and who said in his quiet way:

"Landlord, I learn there is some one here anxious to see me?"

It was the Unknown, and a stillness like death fell upon all in the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

DEVIL DAN'S FUNERAL.

WHEN the Unknown entered the saloon of the Sinner's Rest, the miners felt assured that death was hovering in the air.

A declaration of peace had just been declared between Bowie Ben and Buckskin Mose, when quickly on its heels came a cloud of war between the former and the mysterious stranger.

All that was known of Buckskin Mose in Sawdust City was that he happened to be a new arrival and the friend of Landlord Bunco.

There were two present, Buck Bradford and Hank Holden, who knew a little more of him, from his secret purchase of the Sudden Death Mine, but all present seemed to feel that he was a dangerous man, and one who had perfect confidence in his own pluck, nerve and strength, for he had not flinched from the Unknown, even after Devil Dan's death, and more, he certainly had "gotten the drop" upon Bowie Ben and thereby forced a peace.

Of the Unknown, they had seen him tried by Devil Dan, and he could not have had a worse man to confront than he.

Now when he came into the saloon, after Bowie Ben's assertion that whoever had killed Devil Dan must answer to him, it certainly looked like trouble between the two.

He had bidden them good-night in his polite way, treated half a hundred men to drinks, and then gone to his room.

Bunco certainly had been right there in the bar ever since, so who could have told the stranger that Bowie Ben was there and anxious to meet him, as the slayer of Devil Dan.

He certainly had discovered it in some way, and more, he had promptly come out of his room to see the man who wanted him.

He did not carry his gloves, so no pistol was thus concealed, as before, and his hands hung by his side, so that it could be seen that no revolver was in his grasp, while he still wore his military fatigue coat and it concealed any weapons that might be in his belt.

"Are you the man who killed my pard?" asked Bowie Ben, rising and facing the mysterious stranger.

In clear tones came the answer to break the painful silence:

"I killed a cowardly bully this afternoon, and if he was your pard I must look upon you as equally as bad."

"He was my pard, for he saved my life, and he was a bad man, I admit; but I do not let that stand in the way of my avenging him."

"My friend, I certainly do not care how soon you set to work in your revenge," came the calm, smiling response.

In an instant Bowie Ben would have sent one of his knives flying at the breast of the stranger, for his hands was about to grasp it, while many afterward declared they saw a pistol mysteriously appear in the hand of the Unknown, though where he got it no one could tell, and his arm was about to rise, when Buckskin Mose stepped between the two, with a revolver in each hand, while he said:

"Shendlemans, this vas t'e holy Sunday nights, and you don't vas vant no troubles here."

"Don't shoot, put wait until to-morrows, and haf a nice leetle bickernick all py yourselfs."

The two men eyed the Jew with amazement, while Bunco, taking advantage of the lull also came to the front, and said:

"Yes, pards, fight a squar' duel ter-morrer, fer this permiscuous shootin' is growin' too common in Saw Dust."

"Yas, a duell! a duel ter-morrer," called out many.

Bowie Ben still stood with his hand upon his bowie hilt, the one on his left breast, while the Unknown, with no weapon in his grasp, for it had as mysteriously disappeared as it had appeared in his grip, and seemingly without a movement of his arm, stepped forward, and said:

"Certainly, landlord, let us wait until to-morrow, say after the funeral of this gentleman's lamented friend, whom he seems anxious to follow to the grave."

"I am content," said Bowie Ben, calmly.

"And I, as the challenged party, claim rifles, thirty paces apart, across an open grave, dug by the side of Devil Dan's, for the one who falls."

"Suit yourself, and I am pleased," said Bowie Ben.

"Thank you, and I'll ask Landlord Bunco to serve me as a second," and the Unknown smiled as serenely as though he were doing Bunco a favor.

"And you, pard, I would like to see me through?" and Bowie Ben turned to Buckskin Mose, who replied:

"Mine fri'nt, I'll see you through mit t'e greatest of bleasures, and if you vas kilt I buries you at my own expence."

"Then it is settled, so gentlemen, let us have another glass all round, and I hope, sir, you will join me?" and the Unknown raised his sombrero as he bowed to Bowie Ben, who answered frankly:

"I will drink with you with as much pleasure as I shall kill you to-morrow."

The stranger smilingly bowed, the drinks

were put out on the bar, all dashed them off, excepting Buckskin Mose, and then the mysterious man once more retired to his room for the night, and soon after the miners began to drop away in twos and threes.

Among them were the two friends, Buck Bradford and Hank Holden, the latter saying, as they left the hotel:

"We must not miss the burying to-morrow."

"No, Hank, for I guess there will be stirring times there."

"I guess so, Buck; but what do you think of that Unknown?"

"A remarkable-looking man, Hank, and a dangerous one, from his smile."

"No doubt, and did you notice how he got a pistol in his hand when he faced Bowie Ben?"

"I did, and I saw where it came from."

"Where?"

"He's got a pistol-pocket in the leg of his pants, just by the outer seam, and the coat skirt just hides it."

"He stood with both hands by his side, and by a movement of the fingers drew a weapon without raising his hand, and my idea is that Bowie Ben's knife would never have reached him."

"So it would seem, for that man knew he had time, and would kill, and Ben thought he had it all his own way; but what do you think of the Jew?"

"He's a prairie blossom, as he says himself."

"Well now he is, and I believe he is as dangerous as either the Unknown or Bowie Ben, while he did not seem to particularly avoid trouble."

"No; but he is the friend of Bunco, and I wonder if he bought the mine for the landlord?"

"I think not, but cannot tell, for Bunco is as sly as a prairie dog."

"Well, he's here for some purpose, and we'll have bigger doings in Saw Dust City than we have had yet, and I only wish we could reach our little sum of ten thousand each, we hoped to get, so we could go back home."

"I wish so too, but fear it will be over a year yet before we can."

"Well, we'll do the best we can, and keep clear of all rows if possible," and thus talking the two young miners reached home and retired for the night.

But the morning found them up early and prepared for the events of the day, so they started, after breakfast, for the Sinner's Rest Hotel, to find that the whole camps were going in that direction as the news had spread far and wide of the intended duel between the Unknown and Bowie Ben.

The Sinner's Rest had its flag out, as for a gala day occasion, and there were vast crowds about the place, waiting for the funeral to start.

At length the head of the procession moved out of the hotel, and six miners in red shirts and their Sunday clothes bore the coffin, which was a rudely-made pine box, unpainted and with the legend on the top:

"DEVIL DAN.

Died with his boots on

because

He woke up the wrong passenger.

Peace to Sawdust City now

he's gone."

In front of the hotel stood the ambulance of the Unknown, drawn by the four elks, and it had been kindly loaned by the stranger for the occasion as a hearse.

The Indian in full war paint and feathers was ahead of the elks, the two dogs being just in advance of him, while the negro and Chinese walked at the head of the leaders.

Mounted on his black horse, as a species of mourning for the dead, the miners said, was the Unknown, while by his side rode Bunco, riding an animal he only backed on great occasions.

In their rear came Buckskin Mose and Bowie Ben, side by side, then Buck Bradford and Hank Holden, with hundreds of other miners on foot.

The procession moved off to the music of two accordions, the players having taken their position on each side of the hearse, one at the head of the three red-shirted pall-bearers.

It was a striking procession, and it was no wonder that the four elks seemed a little alarmed at first, until a stern word from their master, the Unknown, calmed them.

"That moosic vas skeer dem, pard," suggested Buckskin Mose.

"Well now, I should think so," growled Bowie Ben.

"Let the band go ahead," suggested Bunco.

"T'e dogs vill eat dem right up quick if dey do," called out Mose, and the band, (!) which seemed about to carry out the landlord's suggestion remained where they were, while the Unknown said:

"Go on with your music, for the dogs will stand it if we can."

"Mine Gracious! mine gracious! Devil Dan vas in luck dat he vas dead!" groaned Buckskin Mose, as the accordions began again with, "Come, haste to the wedding."

But up the trail went the procession, the

miners full of solemn enjoyment of the occasion—and something else—and at last Sinner's Hope was reached.

All preliminaries there had been arranged, for in the center of the lot selected by the Unknown there had been two graves dug, side by side, and an empty coffin was by one.

The ambulance was halted near, the red-shirted pall-bearers took the coffin and lowered it into one grave, while the band (!) played a dirge that made the two dogs howl an accompaniment.

"All ready, pards, for ther other corpse now," called out Deacon Spade, who was the sexton of Saw Dust City, and seemed in his element when burying any one, and made money from the frequency of the funerals.

Then the four mounted men dismounted and walked toward the graves, and they were the Unknown, Bowie Ben, Bunco and Buckskin Mose, the principals and seconds in the duel that was to be fought above the grave of the man that must fall.

CHAPTER XIV.

OVER AN OPEN GRAVE—THE DEATH-SHOT.

As the Unknown approached the grave, he said something in a low tone to the negro, who at once stepped to the ambulance, and took down from where it hung there, a rifle of elegant workmanship.

This the stranger handed to Bunco to hold, and an order to the negro caused him to lead the elk team out of the way, while the Chinese held the horses.

The Indian had also approached the grave, while at his heels were the two immense and savage dogs, whom everybody refrained from crowding.

Bowie Ben had his rifle slung at his back, and taking it in his hands he examined it carefully.

"Gentlemen, the rules of this duel are that the Unknown and Bowie Ben stand back to back, at each side of the grave," called out Bunco in a loud voice, and all was deep attention, the miners, with a knowledge of the situation begotten by long experience, ranging themselves in two lines on either side, the ends being open, for a bullet that missed to have free access, and thus forming a lane of humanity for the combatants to walk through.

Taking his rifle from Bunco the stranger examined it most critically.

In his fingers he held what appeared to be a small mirror, about the size of a silver dollar, and with a wire handle, but what use he meant to make of it none of those who observed it understood.

Throwing the rifle carelessly over his right shoulder, his hand resting near the trigger, and still grasping the wire handle of the little mirror, he took his stand at the grave, his heels upon the edge, while he said in his smiling way:

"I am ready, landlord."

"And so am I," came in the deep voice of Bowie Ben, who took his position on the other side of the grave, his back toward his adversary, and his rifle on his shoulder.

"Put your rifles across your left arms, mine fri'nt, and keep your right hand on t'e triggers, for you use dem quicker," suggested Mose to Bowie Ben, who promptly followed the advice.

"You heard what he told Bowie Ben, sir?" said Bunco.

"I did," was the quiet reply.

"Don't yer think you'd better do the same?"

"I prefer my rifle carried as I now hold it."

"You've got something in your right hand there, you'd better put in your pocket, as it may be in your way."

"No, I prefer to hold it," answered the Unknown, and Buckskin Mose muttered:

"Dat mans vill smile ven he is dead."

Bunco seemed surprised, but did not urge.

His sympathies were all with the Unknown, for the man paid most liberally for all he got, and the landlord felt that being a second to him would put them on a more friendly footing, should Bowie Ben not kill him.

But then all in Saw Dust knew Bowie Ben was a dead shot with the rifle, or revolver, as well as with his knives, and they were offering odds, in their bets as to the result, in favor of the stranger's death.

"Gentlemen!" again called out Bunco in a loud voice, and not a sound could be heard.

"Buck Bradford is to give the words, 'Forward march!'"

"At the word march the men are to step off at an easy pace, while Buck calls out one, two, three, and so on until ten are made."

"Instead of calling out eleven, he will say fire, when the quickest man gets his game."

"There is to be but one shot each, and if these fail there is to be a second trial, and so on until one man falls."

"If either fires before the word fire, I am to take my stand by Bowie Ben and shoot him, if he is the guilty one, while Buckskin Mose stands near the Unknown to kill him, should he be the one, for this is to be a square duel out and out."

"Is this square, pards?"

A yell from the crowd announced their entire satisfaction at the arrangement, and the two men most interested nodded assent.

A moment of dead silence followed, Bowie

Ben, his rifle-barrel resting across his forearm, standing stern and resolute, awaiting the word, while Bunco took his stand near him, to walk by his side, and, revolver in hand, ready to kill him did he fire before the word.

With the cynical smile upon his face, which seemed natural to him, the Unknown stood with his back to his foe and the grave.

His manner was indifferent in the extreme, and his rifle still rested upon his shoulder.

"So cool as ice vas," muttered Buckskin Mose, who was to walk near him, to fire the fatal shot if he should shoot before the word.

"Are you ready?" called out Buck Bradford, and his splendid voice was heard by all.

The Unknown bowed, and Bowie Ben growled out:

"Yes, so set us going."

Then came, in Buck Bradford's clarion voice:

"Forward—March!"

With the word march the two men moved together, and off to one side, and a few feet in the rear walked Bunco and Buckskin Mose, their revolvers in hand, ready for their part of the work if their services were needed.

Then came the words, clear, ringing and in perfect time:

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten—fire!"

Bowie Ben turned as though on a pivot, bringing his rifle up to his shoulder as he did so; but ere his eye, quick as it was, caught the sight, there came a sharp crack, and he sunk forward upon his face, a bullet in his brain.

And the Unknown?

He had not turned at the word.

He had not taken his rifle from his shoulder.

And yet he had fired, and the bullet had gone straight where he intended it should.

He had touched the trigger with his back to his adversary, and he had touched it half a second after the word fire, and just a second before Bowie Ben would have fired, and who did not fire at all.

A murmur of wonder, ending in a shout of admiration arose on all sides, and then calmed down into awe at the act of the strange man.

"Mine fri'nt, how vas you do dot, fer you vas haf no eye in t'e pack of your heads?" said Buckskin Mose.

"Oh, it is a favorite way I have of shooting," was the indifferent reply; but the little mirror, through which he had taken sight was no longer visible in his hand.*

"Deacon Spade, see that the gentleman is well buried, and bring your bill to me," said the Unknown, quietly, and mounting his horse, he rode away, accompanied by Bunco, who was more than ever impressed with his mysterious guest.

Upon the return of the Chinese and negro to the hotel, they were sent up to the Sudden Death Mine to prepare for the coming of their master, who went into the Bonanza Palace store with Bunco, and made what purchases he needed.

A score of men were also hired to go up and make some improvements, add to the stable and put all in better shape, and two days after the Unknown moved into his new quarters, and certainly he made himself most comfortable there.

The day he moved Buckskin Mose bade good-by to Bunco, with the remark:

"I come pack somedimes and see you, Boonco; put now I vas haf to go away."

Soon after he departed, going as he had come, on horseback, and no one knew whither.

Two nights after the departure of Buckskin Mose, while the camps of Saw-Dust City were buried in deep repose, two more men rode away from the Sudden Death Mine, and took the trail leading up into the mountains.

As they ascended the Overland trail the moon, far on its wane, arose above the mountains, and falling upon them revealed the faces of the Unknown and his negro servant, and that they were starting upon a journey of some length seemed evident from the traps carried on each horse, while it was also evident that they desired to avoid attracting the attention of any late wayfarer in the sleeping town.

And yet two persons saw and recognized them as they passed through the camps.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WILD ROSE TRANSPLANTED.

FROM the Far West, poetically called the "Land of the Setting Sun," the scene changes to the East, where the busy hum of toil is heard on all sides, and where the romances of wild adventure have been buried a century or more.

A handsome home in the State of Connecticut is on the shores of Long Island Sound.

The lawn, dotted with majestic elms, slopes down to the shores, where a white beach receives the pulsating surf that falls monotonously upon it.

Back, a few hundred feet is an old mansion

* Shooting by aid of a mirror, with the back to the target, was an unheard-of feat twenty-five years ago.

THE AUTHOR.

of stone, large, rambling and dating back a hundred years.

Rejuvenated in parts, and handsomely furnished, with a broad piazza, large rooms and a cheery aspect generally, it is a delightful abiding-place and evidently the home of wealth and refinement.

A carriage drive winds up to the massive stone steps, and then on to the rear, where extensive out-buildings are visible.

A stone gateway, from which a solid-looking fence runs each way, marking the grounds, opens into the highway, and, besides the dozen acres that comprise the lawn, park, flower and vegetable gardens, the orchard and the stable lots, are a number more under careful cultivation, and meadow and hill-land dotted with cattle and sheep.

Altogether it is a model home, and, with the luxuries within doors, and the beautiful scenery without, it is a place where one would wish to pass his days in tranquil happiness.

In a little basin, formed by a projecting arm of land, are a sail-boat and several row-boats, that invite one to a row or sail upon the waters of the Sound, and running in under easy sail, when the house is presented to the gaze of the reader, is a small schooner yacht with half a dozen men upon her decks.

The yacht luffs up sharp, when near the shore, drops anchor and lowers sail, her movements being watched by a young girl who sits in an easy-chair upon the broad piazza reading and alternately glancing out upon the marine view spread out before her.

A glance at the face of the young girl and the reader recalls the one he saw riding in the cavalcade in the far West, her immediate companion being an old white-haired, gray-bearded man.

It is Rose Ripley, the daughter of the man who fell by the hand of Carter Creighton, and the grandchild of the old Trapper Parson.

No longer in her frontier garb, which she wore as the Girl Queen of the Silver Circle League, though really a captive, she looks very beautiful in her pretty fashionable suit, as she sits there on the piazza.

Soon a lady comes out upon the piazza, and embroidery in hand, seats herself near her.

With calm dignity, a face full of sadness and very beautiful, while she is dressed in black, though not of a mourning kind, the reader recalls Clarice Kenedy, the unfortunate girl who married Carter Creighton, the one whom he sent out upon the waters to die, and who lived to track him, after long wanderings, to his retreat in the mining-camps of Saw Dust City.

The woman whom he recognized, and fled from, to entrap, with her boy guide, Old Nick's Kid, and keep for two years prisoner in the mountain retreat where he and his outlaw comrades searched and searched for the gold-mine of Roy Ripley.

She had seen him, when the prisoner of Buffalo Bill, wounded, and being taken to the fort to be hanged for his crimes, thrown into the flood by his horse and swept away, as all in that cavalcade believed, to death, after the shot of the Chinese at the struggling man.

She had come East with the Trapper Parson, to become the governess of Rose, and nobly had she fulfilled her duties as such.

A natural artist, refined, educated, a fine musician and possessing a superb voice, she had been able to teach her young charge all that she could learn in a fashionable boarding-school.

Gaining her inheritance from her mother, the young girl applied to have her grandfather appointed her guardian, and they had all moved to the old family estate, which had been wholly overhauled and fitted up for their reception.

There, surrounded with luxuries that wealth bought, with carriages and horses, and boats, for their pleasure, the old parson, the governess and Wild Rose seemed perfectly happy after all the vicissitudes that had come to them in the past years.

That pleasant afternoon the parson had driven to the town, some miles distant, for the mail, as was his wont, Rose had devoted herself to a book, and Clarice Kenedy, for she had resumed her maiden name, after painting a while had gone out to the piazza with her embroidery.

"Is not that a pretty little yacht, auntie?" asked Rose, for she had adopted her governess as her auntie.

"Yes, and it has anchored near us, doubtless to remain there through the night," was the reply.

After a little while Rose asked:

"Feel like a row, auntie?"

"I would like to, Rose, but I am anxious to finish these slippers for your grandfather, as I wish to take them into town in the morning, to have them made up," was the reply.

So Rose went alone to the shore, sprung into a light skiff, and seizing the oars sent the boat swiftly over the waters.

She rowed out of the little basin, or harbor, and rode the waves with real delight, as she determined to make a circuit of the anchored schooner, for she saw that she would just about have time to do so by sunset.

So she started off, pulling a steady stroke,

and keeping fully a hundred yards from the yacht, the beautiful outlines of which she admired more and more.

There were but three persons visible upon her deck, and these appeared to be her sailing-master and crew, for two were in the garb of seamen, and the third attired as an officer.

As she was directly astern of the yacht, and pulling by, she read the name on the stern:

"SEA SIREN."

"She is well named, for it is a beautiful little vessel," murmured Rose, who, during her residence at the old home of Elmwood, had become quite an expert sailor and knew a pretty craft when she saw it.

As she was passing a man appeared on deck, dressed in civilian's attire, and the officer pointed to the maiden in the boat.

A moment later the officer hailed with:

"Ahoy, lady! would you be good enough to take a letter ashore for us for the mail?"

"Ay, ay, sir," promptly responded Rose, and she headed her skiff directly for the yacht.

As she ran alongside, the one in civilian's dress met her at the gangway, while the officer stood upon the other side, the former saying, in a polite way:

"Pardon our hailing you so rudely, miss; but my wife is ill in the cabin, and I was anxious to send a telegram, and also a letter, that assistance might be sent.

"Will you not step in and speak with her, for it will please her to see you."

Rose unhesitatingly answered:

"I will send your telegram and letter at once to the station, sir, while I shall be glad to offer the hospitalities of Elmwood to you and your wife, for there she can have every attention."

"You are most kind, miss, and if you would extend the invitation to her personally she might accept it, as she really should be under a physician's care."

"I will see her, sir, with pleasure," and Rose sprung out upon the deck, and was escorted to the cabin by the man who appeared to be the yacht's owner.

As she descended the companionway a strange scene at once occurred, for out of the forward hatch sprung three men, the skiff alongside was cast loose, the sails were set up, and the yacht headed directly out into the Sound, just as the sun touched the horizon.

In the meantime the companionway had been instantly closed, after Rose had entered the cabin, and upon looking around in surprise, she saw that she was alone and a prisoner.

Watching her, from time to time, as she sat on the piazza, Clarice Kenedy saw her hailed from the schooner, and to her surprise beheld her row directly toward it.

"Why, what can Rose mean?" she said to herself, in surprise.

"Yes, she is going alongside—yes, and is getting on board."

"I am surprised at her, for this is not like Rose; but she must have some good reason."

"Ah! she has gone into the cabin, so I will go down and row out to meet her, for— Oh, heavens! what does that mean?"

"They are setting sail, and getting up anchor."

"The poor child has been kidnapped!"

The voice of Clarice Kenedy rung out in alarm, and half a dozen servants came running to her aid.

"See, yonder yacht has Rose on board!"

"They have kidnapped her."

"Quick, Thomas, get a horse to ride to the station, and send two telegrams, one to Newport, where there is a revenue cutter, and to New York, where there are plenty of vessels to go in chase, so the yacht can be headed off."

"I will have the telegrams ready for you."

The servant dashed away, while a maid brought paper and pencil, and still watching the yacht, she wrote the telegrams, and Thomas darted away like the wind, with orders not to spare his horse, and, if he met Parson Ripley, to hasten him on home.

"Now, Lake, get sail on the little sloop, for I shall follow the yacht, to keep her in sight, and if I see a steamer, send her in chase."

"You go with me, Lake, and Bettie, get me half a dozen lanterns for signals."

The governess was calm, but spoke quickly and with decision.

She had not lost her presence of mind in the slightest, and had done just what was best, for if the yacht could be headed off at the East River, or Montauk Point, all would be well, while if she could be kept in sight, by the little sloop yacht belonging to Elmwood, there were strong chances that a steamer would be met with, that could be hailed and sent in chase.

Going to her room Clarice Kenedy attired herself in a yachting suit, and descended to the piazza just as the cook came around with a large basket of provisions, which the governess had ordered her to procure, and another servant had all the lanterns that could be collected about the place.

The governess was a perfect sailor, for, when set adrift by her cruel husband, she had been picked up at sea by a China-bound vessel, and in her effort to reach home from foreign lands,

she had cast aside her garb of a woman and donned a sailor suit, shipping as a cabin-boy.

So she well knew how to handle the yacht, and with Lake the boatman, and another servant to accompany her, she felt most hopeful of keeping the yacht in sight, until she could hail some large vessel and send it in chase.

Night had now fallen upon land and sea, and the white sails of the yacht were visible far away off on the waters, dashing along under impulse of a six-knot breeze.

The little sloop, some twenty-six feet in length, was ready, and springing on board Clarice Kenedy took the helm and started on her pursuit of the kidnappers.

Hardly had she gained an offing, when a horseman dashed up to the door of Elmwood and throwing himself off, called out to a servant:

"Bettie, what of my Wild Rose?"

"She's been stolen, sir, but Mrs. Kenedy has gone in pursuit," was the response.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PARSON'S DREAM.

THE horseman who had dashed up to the door of Elmwood and dismounted was the old Trapper Parson, so long an exile in the Far West, and whose whole life was wrapped up in his beautiful grandchild.

A man of majestic presence, with white hair and beard, a deeply bronzed face, and, though across the threshold of three-score years, remarkably upright in his carriage and quick in his movements and did not appear to feel the age that was upon him.

Whenever he went to the town alone he would ride on horseback, and he mounted and dismounted with the ease of a young man.

He had met the servant dispatched with the telegram and learned from him just what had occurred and all that Clarice Kenedy had done.

"God bless her, she has done all that could be done," he cried, as he dashed on home, urging his surprised and staid old horse into a full run.

"How long has Mrs. Kenedy been gone, Bettie?" he asked, eagerly.

"You see her sail yet, sir, just over the boat-house."

"Yes, I see it; and the kidnapper?"

"Has disappeared, sir, to us, but I guess Mrs. Kenedy has her eye on him from where she is."

"Heaven grant it."

And calling to Bettie to tell him all as he walked along, the old man hastened toward the little pier.

He heard just how Rose had gone out for a row and then pulled alongside of the yacht when hailed.

"How many men were on the yacht, Bettie?"

"There were three, sir, until Miss Rose went near, when another came out of the cabin, and then three or four more rushed out from below and set sail, for I was sewing up-stairs, sir, by the window and saw all."

"How long had the yacht been at anchor?"

"Not more than an hour, sir."

"I cannot understand it, and yet—"

"Sir?"

"And yet I fear that I can."

And the old man gazed out upon the dark waters, to where, indistinctly visible, was the sail of the little Elmwood sloop.

His eyes had long been trained to gazing at long distances and to seeing in the night-time, so, old though he was, he saw the craft when Bettie, a young woman, could not do so.

At last the yacht disappeared, and the parson returned to the mansion.

But he left untasted the supper set before him and paced to and fro.

He knew that all had been done that could be done through the presence of mind of Clarice Kenedy, and that he could do nothing more.

He must wait, and with the patience of an Indian he did so, uttering no word of complaint and keeping up his walk to and fro.

Thus the hours wore on, and as midnight drew near he went to the dock again, feeling that there must soon be some news of the missing one.

The wind was fresh, and out upon the waters he beheld a sail.

It was heading shoreward, and he soon saw that it was the little Sea Rose, as Clarice had named the little Elmwood yacht.

Had she overhauled the fugitive?

Was his Wild Rose on board?

These thoughts surged through his brain, and he kept his eye riveted upon the little craft.

There were half a dozen lights visible upon her deck, and he had been told that Mrs. Kenedy had taken them along, and he feared this was no lighting up in token of success.

So he waited until the little yacht ran into the basin, luffed sharp and dropped anchor.

Then Clarice Kenedy was rowed ashore by Luke, and she sprung toward the parson, crying:

"Oh, Mr. Ripley, we have lost her!"

"Yes; and you have no tidings of her?" he asked, calmly.

"None; for it seems there were several little vessels out upon the Sound when we started in chase, and I followed the wrong one."

"I hailed a steamer bound to Fall River, told her captain just what had been done, and he kindly ran after the yacht I was following and brought her to."

"But Rose was not on board, and the young yachtsman was most indignant that he had been taken for a kidnapper, yet softened down when I offered my excuses and told the circumstances."

"Then, as there was no other vessel in sight, I put back home, for I knew you were most anxious, and besides, I could do nothing more and feel that the two vessels I telegraphed to would intercept her at one or the other end of the Sound."

"You have done just right, Clarice, and I thank you, while I have hope that the craft will be overhauled by one of the vessels you telegraphed to the authorities to send to head them off."

"I sincerely hope so," was the reply of Clarice Kenedy.

And the two returned to the mansion out of which the sunlight had gone by the going of Rose.

But the morning brought no news, and all the next day the parson and the governess were at the telegraph-office, sending messages often yet getting no glad tidings.

A large tug had been sent in search of the kidnappers from New York, and from Newport the revenue-cutter had run down to the entrance of the Sound and hailed every vessel for inquiries of the yacht, while all that looked suspicious were brought to and boarded.

Still no satisfaction could be obtained from any, and after two days the search was given up by all—not by all, for the old parson had been plotting to find his darling in another way.

What his plot was he made known to Clarice Kenedy, as the two sat in the library of Elmwood the third evening after the kidnapping of Rose.

"Clarice, do you know that I have a clew?" asked Parson Ripley, calmly.

"Oh, tell it me," cried Clarice, eagerly.

"Last night I had a dream that impressed me deeply, and I am determined to act upon the strength of that."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"And you believe in dreams, sir?"

"Well, I am not superstitious enough to believe wholly in dreams, but this one, coming as it did to me last night, impressed me deeply."

"I could not sleep until nearly dawn, and then, thoroughly exhausted, I dropped into deep slumber."

"Will you tell me the dream?"

"Yes; and yet I dislike to recall any bitter memories to you."

"Do not think of me, sir, but let us see if your dream really gives us a clew."

"Well, I heard a voice calling aloud:

"Carter Creighton! Carter Creighton!"

"I dreamt that I was lying in the Gold Canyon, where we captured Creighton, and hearing this voice I arose."

"I saw a man coming along the valley, and he it was that was calling Carter Creighton."

"I dreamt that I arose and said to him:

"My man, the one whom you call is dead."

"But he replied:

"No, he is not dead, and I am seeking him."

"He is dead," I returned, "for I saw him swept away by a torrent, and with a wounded arm he could not save himself, while he was fired upon by a Chinese and sunk."

"He did not die, as you supposed, but lived, and he sent me on a mission for him, and I have come to tell him that I did what I agreed to and wish my pay."

"And the man again raised his voice and made the canyon ring with his call of:

"Carter Creighton! Carter Creighton!"

"This is remarkable," said Clarice, deeply impressed with the dream of the parson, who returned:

"But this is not all, Clarice, for I dreamt that I said to him:

"What mission did he send you upon?"

"He sent me East to kidnap the little girl, Wild Rose, and bring her West, and I have done it," came the startling reply.

"So startling was it that I dreamt that I sprung at his throat, crying:

"Tell me where my child is, or I will kill you!"

"I awoke then, to find that I had sprung from my bed, and the sweat stood in great beads upon my brow."

"I was deeply impressed with the dream, and I walked the floor for some time ere I returned to bed."

"Then I sunk to sleep almost immediately, and again that dream passed through my brain, just as before, and once more I sprung from the bed."

"Once more I sought rest, and a third time the dream came to me, and a third time I awoke at the moment I demanded to know where my child was."

"Then, prostrated, I once more sought rest; but I dreamed no more, and only awoke with the clanging of the rising bell."

"All day I have brooded over that dream,

Clarice, and it has impressed me so deeply that I am determined to act upon it."

"And what would you do, sir?"

"I shall ask you to remain here in charge of the house while I go West at once."

"Arriving on the border, I shall seek Buffalo Bill, tell him of poor Rose, and of my dream, and do as he deems best."

"Do you think I should?"

"By all means, sir, for, after all Carter Creighton may not be dead, though we all believed he sunk before our eyes."

"Yet, he is a bold swimmer, a man of wonderful pluck and endurance, and, if he lived and got money, I feel that he would still seek revenge both against you and me."

"I feel so, and I will not be content until I have seen Buffalo Bill and know what he will do, for if he strikes the trail he will find out whether Carter Creighton is dead or alive, and if alive, then he it is who has stolen my child."

"I fear so; but when do you start, sir?"

"On the morning train," and the next night saw the old parson flying westward as fast as steam could carry him, to seek Buffalo Bill in his frontier home.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SURGEON SCOUT.

"PARD, don't yer go and make no mistake, for ef yer strikes the trail alone yer'll be Injun-meat sart'in."

This remark was addressed by a plainsman to a stranger who had come into a small border town on the stage, and was seeking information as to how he could reach Fort —.

He was told that just then the guides were away from the place, and that it was a most dangerous undertaking, as Indians had been raiding the country of late; but he had replied that it was important to go at once, and, as he could get no guide, he would go alone.

In response to the words that open this chapter, he replied:

"I thank you, my friend; but I am not new to border life, and I can find my way, I am sure, while I have the best of arms, and wish to purchase a good horse."

Of course the borderman had a horse to sell; but he soon found the purchaser a perfect judge of horseflesh, and unable to prove to him the going and staying qualities of his animal, he knew where he could get one that "would jist fill ther bill."

After some search, and an examination of a score of animals, the stranger selected a horse that was certainly a fine appearing steed, while that he was a good one the borderman's remark to a comrade proved, for he said:

"He knows horse from hoof ter head, and he jist pounced onter Bart Revels's bay, the longest-winded and fastest horse in these parts, as yer knows."

"Oh, he knows horse, he does, and when Bart said three hundred fer him, he said:

"He's worth it, mister, and here's yer dust."

"Then he's got ther dust, pard?" asked the other, in a low tone.

"Yas, he hes, and in plenty."

"He carries a gold watch and chain, too, like as not?"

"Waal, now, he does."

"How's he fixed fer weepens?"

"He's got a repeatin' rifle, he tells me, and a pair of revolvers, while o' course he's a bowie."

"And he's goin' alone?"

"Yas."

"Injuns will git him."

"So I told him, but he'll chance it."

"When does he start?"

"At dawn in ther morning."

"And whar did yer say he was goin'?"

"To Fort —."

"Then he'll take ther valley trail."

"Yas, for I told him thet were ther best."

"You knows him, then?"

"Nary; no more than I come in on the coach with him."

"I see," and the man turned away, while the one who had aided the stranger in the purchase of a horse and outfit went to the tavern to still further befriend him if necessary.

"Good-by, pard, and luck to yer," he said, as he got up early the next morning to see the stranger off.

"Good-by, Ed, I thank you," was the reply, and the stranger, mounted upon a splendid horse, and with an outfit of provisions, ammunition and blankets for his trip of several days, set out upon his journey, the kind-hearted borderman calling out adieu after him as far as he could hear it."

Alone upon his way the stranger showed a knowledge of bordercraft, and appeared to have no dread of not being able to find his way.

He camped, after ten miles, for breakfast and rest of an hour, and took good care of his horse.

At noon he halted again, and was glad to see that his horse, although he had dropped forty miles behind him, showed no signs whatever of distress.

Toward sunset he began to search for a place in which to camp.

He knew now that he was in the red-skin country and must be very cautious.

He had crossed several fresh trails during the day, the unshod hoofs telling him that they were Indian ponies.

One trail, made by two horses that were shod, he did not quite understand.

It had come into the valley from the left and he had, in going on his way, followed it all the afternoon.

But as night grew near, it had branched off again toward some heavy timber.

But he went on as before, and yet that trail seemed to run in his mind.

"Some scouts, doubtless," he said, and seeing a bit of wooded hill-land off to the right, he concluded to go there for his night's camp.

He could not have selected a better place, for there was a ravine, with a spring in it, and about it the greatest quantity of grass for his horse.

He soon had the animal staked out, and collecting some sticks built a fire, determined to refresh himself with a tin cup of hot coffee.

Night had fallen, as he sat by his camp-fire, eating his supper, his face sad and anxious, though not on his own account it would seem, as he did not apparently dread personal danger.

He had built the fire back in a little water wash, so that it could not be seen at a distance, and he had thrown his roll of blankets down near to make his bed, when he should wish to retire.

Little did he dream, as he sat there, that over the bank above two pair of eyes were peering down upon him.

There in the darkness crouched two forms, and apparently satisfied with their observation and determined to act, one of the men drew a revolver, rested its muzzle upon the bank, and was taking aim at the unsuspecting victim, when a short distance away, back among the timber, came a flash and report.

The report of the assassin's revolver also followed, for the finger upon the trigger in the death twitch had pulled it off, though the man firing it had fallen forward into the ravine, dead ere he struck the bottom.

His companion had sprung to his feet, with a cry of alarm, and turned to fly, while he held his revolver in hand.

Instantly a tall form came quickly toward him, and two shots rung out.

One was fired by the comrade of the assassin, and the other by the tall form advancing upon him.

In the mean time the intended victim in the ravine had not been hurt, and sprung quickly to the cover of a tree not far distant, his rifle ready.

He saw the other shots, beheld a man fall, in the light of the flashes, and then the tall form advanced to the ravine and peered over, still grasping his revolver, while he called out:

"Ho, stranger, where are you?"

"I am here, sir, and as your face was in the firelight, I recognized you, Doctor Powell," and the stranger advanced from his place of refuge.

"Can I believe my eyes, that I see the Trapper Parson of Saw Dust City?" cried the one who had done such deadly work a moment before.

"Yes, Doctor Powell, I am Mr. Ripley, whose home was in the mountains a few miles from the mining-camp of Saw Dust City, while you were stationed at the barracks.

"It was at my home that you visited my poor son when he was killed, his child and all of us hoping that he was not dead, and I can never forget your kindness, Surgeon Powell," and the old parson grasped the hand of the splendid-looking man before him, for splendid in physique, noble in face and true-hearted and fearless he was.*

"It was a sad sight to me, Parson Ripley, to find your noble son dead, and see his death drive his beautiful wife to madness; but I have heard from our mutual friend, Buffalo Bill, how much you have suffered, and that the man who killed your son, ay, and caused his wife's death from grief, stole from you their child, the little girl that rode after me to save her father's life.

"I have heard all, and how you went East to live in happiness and comfort, so I confess I am surprised to see you West again on the plains."

In a few words Parson Ripley told his sad story and that he was again in search of his stolen grandchild.

"You have my deepest sympathy, parson, and I give you the hope that if she was brought West by that man, whom you seem to feel is not dead, that Buffalo Bill will find her.

"But how glad I am that I have found you, for it is merely by accident, I having wished to go to the town to see a sick friend there, one who was badly wounded, and volunteered to take some dispatches for the general at the fort.

* Doctor Frank Powell, then surgeon in the army, and who has won the border sobriquets of Surgeon Scout, Wizard Doctor, Mighty Medicine Man, Fancy Frank, White Beaver, etc. Doctor Powell is now residing at La Crosse is one of the chief physicians of the State of Wisconsin.

"I met there Bill Buckner, an old scout, who married and settled there, and he told me, just as I was starting back to the fort that I might have had company if he had known I was going so soon.

"He also told me you had left at dawn, and that two hard characters had left the night before, he had just found out, and he feared they meant to give you trouble.

"One of the men he had told, without thinking, that you were well fixed with money, and he had questioned him closely, and it coming to his mind afterward, he had looked him up, fearing that he meant to rob you.

"Then he found that he had gone, and along with him a desperado of the worst kind.

"Hearing their names I knew them as old offenders and that the general wanted them for crimes and would hang them at sight.

"So I pushed on fast after you, saw where you rode into their trail and where they left the main track, you keeping on.

"Then I turned back and waited for them, and followed them to your camp, but came within an ace of being too late, for I fired as that fellow there had his finger on the trigger."

"You saved my life and my child thereby from worse than death, if she is in the hands of that man.

"But what became of the other assassin?"

"Oh, he lies up there on the hill awaiting burial."

"Let us bury them then, Surgeon Powell."

"Yes; we can soon do that in this soft soil, and I'll bring the other candidate down here and go after their horses and my own, while you start in on the grave-digging."

An hour after the two villains, one of whom was the questioner of the honest scout, were buried in the same grave, and then the parson and Frank Powell turned in for the night, the former happy in finding one whom he knew to be Buffalo Bill's boon companion at the fort.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S PLEDGE.

It was certainly a very great relief to the old parson, to meet in the wilds one whom he had known before, and who was going directly to the fort where he expected to find Buffalo Bill.

He knew, too, that he owed to Frank Powell his life, as the two men who had trailed him would certainly have killed him.

"I have quite a large sum of money with me, doctor," he said, as they rode along the next day together; "and I brought it, not knowing how much I would need."

Doctor Powell was dressed in an undress uniform, wore cavalry boots, a black sombrero, a repeating rifle hung at his saddle-horn, and he was armed also with a pair of revolvers.

He was mounted upon a long-bodied, long-limbed roan mare, which showed speed and bottom in her build, and he rode like one born in the saddle.

He wore his hair long, his face was full of resolution and intelligence, and his voice was soft-toned and very winning.

The parson had heard of his many daring deeds, and knew also that no more skillful surgeon, or learned physician, had ever been in the United States service.

During the day they talked of many things, the parson telling the doctor how happy they had all been in their home, which happiness had been so rudely broken by the stealing of Rose.

"And your dream caused you to come out here, expecting that after all the Monté Man might really be the kidnapper?" said Frank Powell.

"Yes, I confess that I had not a thought of Carter Creighton, in connection with the kidnapping of my child, until that most singular dream."

"Well, dreams are strange things, and there is no accounting for some of them, I admit.

"But you tell Cody your dream, and my word for it he will say that he will believe in the dream."

"And you think he can leave the fort now?"

"Oh yes, he will manage to do so, for he can leave some of his scouts in charge; but see there, just over yonder rise of the prairie, do you observe a dark spot?"

"I do," said the parson, looking in the direction indicated by the eyes of the surgeon, for he did not point.

"It is an Indian's head."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, he is watching us, and sees us riding directly toward him, and hopes that we will ride directly into their ambush."

"You think there are more than he?"

"Oh yes, for he would have gone, at seeing us, had he been alone, or even had a companion; but his remaining shows that he has comrades enough over the rise to make him bold."

"You feel certain it is an Indian?"

"Oh, yes, I know it."

"I have flattered myself, doctor, upon being a pretty good plainsman, but I see that you can readily teach me, for I do not see how you know that head belongs to a red-skin and not a white man, as it is too far off to see his face."

"It is very easily explained, for the sun falls upon us, and if it was a white scout he would

recognize us as comrades and not remain in hiding."

"True, I see your reasoning now, and it but carries out the splendid reputation you have won as a plainsman; but what are we to do?"

"Ride straight on."

"And receive their fire?"

"No, for I have a weapon here that will double the range of any weapon they have, and I see that you also carry a good gun.

"Now we will pretend not to see them, until we get near the ridge, and then I will drop my hat, dismount to pick it up, and in remounting throw my rifle across my saddle and fire.

"Then we will charge directly for the rise, and my idea is that we will surprise the surprisers, and put them to flight.

"If they are too many for us, we can outrun them, for I know that horse you ride, and he is as fleet as my mare, while these led animals are good runners, or they belie their looks.

"If they crowd us, then our rifles can keep them at a distance."

"You are captain, sir, and I follow your lead with pleasure and confidence; but let me tell you frankly that I will fire only to save life.

"I carry the best of weapons, as you see, and I am a dead shot; but, Surgeon Powell, I was educated for the ministry, and it was while pastor of a church in Virginia that I was forced to take human life in defense of my own, and it so hurt me that I gave up my charge and came West.

"No one blamed me, it is true, and my own conscience cleared me, yet I felt that I had no right to preach after it, to those who knew the circumstance, and so I led the life of a trapper, all alone, for my wife was dead, and my son was married, and I was really alone in the world.

"I vowed to kill Carter Creighton, and I would have done so, rather than he should escape the gallows; but I feel that if I can avoid it, I shall never take human life, even if it be to fire on a red-skin.

"Still, if it becomes necessary, you will not find me backward in aiding you all in my power."

"My dear parson, I admire you for your conscientiousness, and I have made it a rule never to fire ruthlessly at a human being.

"But it has been my misfortune to often take human life, and in this case I fear we must act to save ourselves, for the red-skins are on the war-path, they are between us and the fort, encamped upon our trail, and we must not let them scalp us."

"True, and I am ready to do as you deem best."

They had now approached within a couple of hundred yards of the rise, which was more abrupt than elsewhere on the prairie over which they were passing, and the little dark object was visible just where it had been first seen.

Judging from the rise on this side, Frank Powell decided that the fall beyond could conceal a number of mounted Indians, who would be only a few paces back of the one who was watching them.

As they drew nearer he took off his hat, wiped his forehead, and in replacing it upon his head managed to let it drop.

He turned, made two or three pretended attempts to pick it up without dismounting, and in doing so loosened his rifle from his saddle-horn.

Then he dismounted, picked up his hat, and while pretending to tighten his girth suddenly sent a bullet crashing into the dark object upon the top of the prairie rise.

Ere the report had died away he was in the saddle, and both he and the parson were charging toward the rise.

As they did so a mounted Indian dashed up, sprung to the ground and attempted to throw the body of his slain comrade across the back of his horse.

Instantly a shot from Doctor Powell brought the horse down and, with a yell, the red-skin fled from sight.

"I shot the horse and spared the rider, parson," said Frank Powell, as they dashed up to the top of the rise.

There lay the slain warrior and the horse, and the one whose animal had been killed was flying on foot over the prairie toward a score of mounted warriors who were dashing toward them.

"Those two braves were selected to ambush us, and the others were to dash up after we fell, or if they failed to kill us.

"See, yonder is the horse of the Indian I killed."

And he pointed to a pony running loose upon the prairie.

"Now let those fellows crowd us if they wish, and if you will kindly lead both of these horses, I will do the keeping at bay work."

And Frank Powell handed over the lariat-end of the horse he led to the parson.

It was very evident that the Indians had been taken by surprise, by the shot of the doctor, and they eyed the two men with strange looks when they rode by the dead red-skin and pony without even a glance at them.

As the two white men held steadily along on

their trail, apparently regardless of their presence, the Indians divided into four parties of five each, and they moved apart in a manner that showed they intended to encircle their foes.

The rear party went back, and having caught the loose pony, tied the dead brave upon his back, while the dismounted warrior sprung up behind one of his comrades.

This party brought up the rear, while a second and third went upon either side of the whites, and the fourth kept ahead of them upon the trail.

Thus the doctor and the parson were completely surrounded, though they still held upon their way steadily, and the red-skins had the cunning to keep at a good distance.

"Those fellows know that their rifles will not reach us, and they think they are out of range of mine; but I will convince them to the contrary, for that party in front are allowing us to get a little nearer."

"Do you see that white horse, parson?"

"Yes, doctor."

"I hate to kill an innocent brute; but therein lies our safety, for we must drive them red rascals off before going into camp to-night, if we wish any rest."

"Now watch the white horse."

As he spoke the doctor threw his rifle to his shoulder, the report followed almost immediately, and down dropped the white horse, throwing his rider over his head.

"I'll give the others a reminder not to crowd us," and quickly three more shots were fired and as many ponies dropped, one in each of the other three parties.

Yells of rage followed, but the red-skins hastily began to place a greater distance between them and a man who shot with such deadly aim, and at the same time could kill at such a long range.

"Further than that, my red gentlemen, for we do not wish to be crowded," and as the doctor spoke he again fired four shots in rapid succession, one in front, one in the rear, and one on either side.

"You have dismounted more of them," cried the parson.

"Yes; I guess they will give us room now, and not follow, for with eight braves to double on their ponies, they will hunt camp."

"That is the secret of my going alone as I do, parson, so much on the plains, and Buffalo Bill has the same secret, a long-range repeating-rifle, to keep an enemy a long way off, and a horse that can outfoot almost any foe put in chase of him."

As Frank Powell had said, the red-skins, knowing that their rifles would not reach their foes, and with a number of their braves dismounted and one slain, gave up trying to close in upon the two white horsemen and were soon left far behind, so that they camped that night with no fear of their foes of the morning.

The next day they reached the fort, and the first man to greet them was Buffalo Bill, who was amazed to see the old parson, and heard his story with deep interest.

"I would wager high, parson, that the Monté Man is dead, for if he had not drowned, that Chinese was no slouch of a shot and sent his bullet straight; but I never disregard a dream when it comes in that shape, and I pledge you my word if your enemy is alive I'll find him, and more, there will be no doubt of his death next time," and as Buffalo Bill gave the pledge he grasped the hand of the parson warmly, while Frank Powell said:

"When Bill gives his pledge, parson, count on it to the death."

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE TRAIL.

"BILL, my idea is that there will be some red work on the trail you and the parson are going to follow, and you will need the services of a surgeon, so I volunteer mine."

And Frank Powell came into the quarters of Buffalo Bill at Fort —, where the famous scout was seated talking to the old parson and arranging their plans to start in the search of Carter Creighton.

"Frank, there is no man I would rather have go than you, but can you be spared?" asked the scout.

"Yes; for I just left the general, and he said that he would spare you willingly upon such a duty as was before you; and as there are now two assistant surgeons in the fort, I asked for leave too and got it, for he said that I might be needed; so I go too."

"And glad am I that you do."

"I certainly need not tell you how happy I am, sir," said the parson, fervently.

"Well, I'm equally as happy in going; but, Bill, the general said that he forgot to tell you that you could take a few soldiers with you if you wished."

"No, we will go alone, excepting Old Nick, who knows the Monté Man well as well as the country and will be useful."

And turning to the parson he said:

"I mean by Old Nick, parson, the boy who

was captured with Mrs. Creighton, the Black Canary."

"You remember I kept him with me, but he went to guiding, and some days ago came back to the fort to go to scouting, as the Indians were on the war-trail."

"He was an odd boy, but a brave one, as I remember him, and Clarice often spoke of him and her long captivity with him," replied the parson.

And just then Old Nick came into the scout's quarters.

He was a well-formed boy of seventeen, rather slightly built, but wiry, and his face was a mixture of mischief, cunning, recklessness and resolution.

He was dressed in buckskin, even to moccasins, wore a light soft hat, and was armed thoroughly.

"Here, Old Nick, you remember the parson, the grandfather of the pretty Wild Rose?" said Buffalo Bill.

"Parson, I'm as glad ter see yer as though I'd run a nail in my foot. I am, fer a fact; but how's Miss Clarice and ther pretty Wild Rose?" said Old Nick, with a warm grasp of the parson's hand.

"Ah, my son, they have stolen my child from me," and the parson told why he was there.

"And I'm one, hain't I, Mister Bill?" eagerly said the boy.

"Yes, Old Nick; I just said before you came in that I would take you along."

"Good for you, Mister Bill; but see here, there's got ter be a change in my name, for Old Nick and a parson don't go in comp'ny, unless I has got Sunday-school primmers twisted in their meaning."

"You are right, Old Nick—"

"There it is again, Mister Bill, so I'm going to change my name and git the parson to baptize me in ther creek."

"Miss Clarrie, parson, used ter call me Sol, for the miners called me Uncle Solomon and Sassy Sol; but she cut it down to just Sol, and I'd like to stick to it, if it's all the same to you, sir."

"Certainly, my boy; but have you no real name?" asked the parson, gazing with kindly intent upon the waif.

"It seems to me I had a different name once, but I has forgot it, for you see I am only a waif."

"I know only that I've been knocked about the mining-camps, like a stray dog, ever since I kin recommember, and I'm all alone in ther world, and solitary, so just call me Sol."

"Then Sol it shall be," said Buffalo Bill, and the four then set to work discussing their plans for the future.

It was late when they had made all arrangements for an early start the following morning; but they were up in time, and rode out of the fort, Sol, as I must now call him, leading a couple of pack-horses well loaded with provisions and other necessities for their expedition, while a huge black dog trotted at their heels.

"Wishee me go allee samee, Missee Billee," said one of two Chinese who were to see them start, and who was Hop-Up, who had been with the scout on his former rescue of the Wild Rose.

"Me wantee go allee samee, too," said his brother, Dick Skillet, recalling their former scouting trip with pleasure.

"And so would I, Massa Bill," called out a tall negro soldier, in the uniform of a sergeant.

"Yes, boys, I know you would like to go, but I must go without you this time, though if I need help, I shall send word back to the general, and Sergeant Toby you must bring my Chinese scouts with you."

"I will, Massa Bill, for they is tip-top on a scout, sah, as we knows; but luck to you, sah, and to ther parson and Surgeon Powell also, while thet boy will have luck anyhow I know," and Sergeant Nicodemus Toby saluted as the party rode on.

"Now, which way, Bill?" asked Frank Powell, as they reached a spot where several trails diverged.

"Straight along the trail to the point where the Monté Man was supposed to have been lost."

"You do not expect to find any evidence of his having gotten ashore there at this late day?"

"No, doctor, but I will find out if it was possible for him to get ashore, if he was not killed by Hop-Up's bullet."

"Ah! I see, Bill; you are going to begin at the bottom and climb to the top, and it is just your way," answered Frank Powell, and so they followed the trail leading back to the mountains where the Silver Circle League had had their secret retreat.

It was noon the next day when they camped upon the stream, just where they had crossed the day that Carter Creighton was supposed to have been killed.

While the others were looking after the animals, Buffalo Bill walked down the bank of the stream for some little distance.

Then he returned slowly, half undressed himself, and called out:

"Doc, I'm going to make a trial swim," and instantly he plunged into the raging torrent.

The others were startled by his act, and hastened to the banks, as he went speeding along on the foaming surface of the stream.

They saw that he swam well and used but one hand, while he headed for the spot where Carter Creighton had been seen to go down.

Just there he dove, and reappearing quickly, as the others feared he had been dashed upon a rock, he swept down into the fierce rapids below.

But he swam with great power and ease, and at one place only had to exert his full strength and use both arms, and then but for a moment, for he reached the shore, while a shout went up from those on the other bank.

"I will come up this side and cross at the ford," he called out, and the others returned to their camp.

In half an hour he came across the river, resumed his clothing and joined them.

"Well, Bill, you made it," said Frank Powell.

"Yes, and with almost as much clothing as Creighton had on."

"I dove at the place where he disappeared, and there is good water there, while I swam with one arm only, as he must have done, until I reached the little point that you saw me land upon."

"There I was forced to use both arms for an instant, and you remember the wound I gave him, parson, was through the fleshy part of the arm, and I never thought it as bad as he made it out, so he could have aided himself with it that day."

"But the shot of the Chinese, Bill?"

"May have hit him, Doc, and slightly wounded him, while he may have sunk purposely, to lead us to believe he was hard hit."

"True."

"But I made a discovery upon the other side."

"Well?" and all spoke the word in chorus.

"There is a small sapling there, that has been chopped off with a knife, and about four feet of it, I should judge, was cut off apparently to serve as a club or staff."

"The stump is there and the top of the sapling which prove this."

"And this is a good proof that some one needed it," said the parson.

"Yes; and you remember that Creighton was allowed to keep his knife to eat with, and had it in his belt, while he had no other weapons, and would naturally need a club."

"No one riding by or walking could have done it?" asked the doctor.

"No; for the place is a mass of piled-up rocks, and but one thing would take a man there, and that is to land from the water, as I did, and this convinces me that there is a great deal in the parson's dream, for I am now convinced that the Monté Man did not die that day, as we supposed, and I shall start from here to find him," said Buffalo Bill, firmly.

CHAPTER XX.

THE UNKNOWN GOLD KING.

AFTER an hour's camp at noon the party crossed the stream, and leaving Sol to take care of the horses, the three men went on foot to the spot where the scout had left the stream.

There was the cut sapling, and then they felt assured that Don, the Monté Man, had been the one to cut it down.

From there they took the track they deemed he would most likely follow, the scout arguing that, as he had not been able to find Roy Ripley's gold mine, and yet he knew that he could get some gold pickings back in the valley, he would be most likely to go back there.

"It is nearer back to the gold canyons than to any settlement, and you remember we left some old arms there and a couple of horses that were of little use, and a few provisions we could not bring, so he would go to the nearest place where he could get food," said the scout, and the others agreed with him.

Then the time of day when the man had escaped was recalled, and Buffalo Bill said:

"He would have just about time to go half a dozen miles before camping, so we'll look for his camp, for the burned logs will yet show."

"But how could he light a fire if he was wet through, as matches would be no use?"

"True, Doc, but I remember that he had a water-proof match-box with him," was the answer.

So they mounted and rode on, and in about an hour's ride the scout drew rein and pointed to a tree some distance off the roadside.

In a crotch of the tree were half a dozen poles, so placed that they formed a resting-place for any one who might have sought it as such.

The stumps of the sapling about the trees showed where the poles had been cut.

"His match-box failed him, or he wished to keep his matches for future use, for he spent his first night up there, out of reach of the wolves," and Buffalo Bill pointed to the resting-place in the tree.

"You think then that Carter Creighton is really the man whose trail you are following

with such marvelous skill?" eagerly asked the parson.

"Yes, parson, I'll wager high that Creighton lives," was the confident reply.

"And so will I, for he shows the nerve of a man that does not say die," responded Frank Powell, and mounting, the party continued on their way once more, following the trail which the cavalcade had come from the mountains by some time before.

Halting at nightfall, they enjoyed a hearty supper, all feeling hopeful that they were on the right track, and, after a good night's rest they were on their way once more early the next morning.

Several hours after Buffalo Bill came upon some bones beneath a tree.

"These are wolf bones, and right up yonder in that tree is where our man passed his second night," and the scout pointed to several poles up in the tree, so arranged as to form a seat there, some twenty feet from the ground.

"He killed that wolf as he came down, for they doubtless serenaded him all night, and crowded him too close the next morning," remarked Doctor Powell.

Once more they resumed their way, and the next morning drew near the canyons, making a circuit so as to approach by the rocky entrances, and not by way of the cliffs, which they knew no way of getting down.

As they drew near the canyons, the eyes of the party fell together upon a man trudging along out of some heavy timber and walking toward the rocky gateway of the canyon where had been the camp of the Silver Circle League.

"Oh! is it he?" cried the parson.

"No, but wait and I'll rope the gentleman in," and Buffalo Bill rode forward at a gallop.

The man had not seen the party, and Buffalo Bill gained a position ahead of him, and suddenly sung out:

"Hands up, pard, and quick about it!"

Down went the rifle upon the ground, and up went both hands.

Then the scout rode forward, and the others came up at a gallop.

He was a miner, judging from his clothing, and he seemed frightened; but the scout called out:

"Don't die of fright, pard, for we mean you well, unless you force us to kill you."

"Now who are you, and what are you doing here?"

"My name is Jack Frost, pard, and I was out on a hunt fer a leetle gam; fer ther boys in camp."

"Where is your camp?"

"Up in the Gold Canyon."

"What are you doing there?"

"Mining."

"Striking anything rich?"

"Yes, plenty of it."

"Ah! and how many are in the camp?"

"About forty, I reckon, counting all."

"How long have you been here?"

"Nigh about a year."

"Where did you come from?"

"Ther boss picked us up in and about Helena."

"And brought you here to work the mines?"

"Yes, pard."

"And who is your boss?"

"Give me a easy question, pard, fer I don't know."

"What is his name?"

"We calls him ther Gold King, fer all ther dust here is his, and he pays us well."

"Then you are in his employ?"

"Yes."

"And you do not know his name?"

"No, pard; not one of us as I knows on, fer he gave us no name—just brought us here, set us to work, and told us ter keep at it."

"He feeds us well, we has good cabins, ther dust pans out pretty rich, and we are content."

"I see; but he does not live here with you?"

"No, pard."

"Where does he live?"

"Ask me something easy."

"When did you see him last?"

"A month ago."

"When do you expect him?"

"Any time, no time."

"You have a mining boss over you?"

"I'm ther boss, when the cap'n's away."

"What kind of a man is your captain?"

"He's a man as smiles pleasant even while he's shootin' ter kill, fer he has turned up ther toes of some of ther boys as thought they'd run him; but he feeds us well, pays well, and runs things to suit himself."

"What kind of a looking man is he?"

"A good-sized man, but he's getting along in years, for his hair and beard is whiter than that gent's," and he nodded toward the parson.

"Too bad, for I thought we had our man," muttered the scout, and again he asked:

"Does he tell you to keep strangers away?"

"No, pard, for he didn't expect no strangers to come into these mountains."

"Well, you see he was mistaken."

"It seems so, pard; and as you seem friendly, I'll ask you up to camp, you and your friends, where you are welcome to the best we have."

"Thank you, my friend; we will accept your

invitation," and the party started off, the miner leading the way.

The miners were just arriving in camp as the horsemen appeared, it being late and they having knocked off work for the day.

Somewhere were who instantly recognized the scout and Surgeon Powell, and they all received a warm greeting; but, try as they might, all that the trailers of Don the Monté Man could find out about the mysterious owner of that secret mine, was that he was a tall man, with snow-white hair and beard, possessing a smile more dangerous than a frown, and had employed them to work for him, paying them well for their services, and visiting the canyon every month or so, accompanied at one time by a giant negro, at another by a Chinese, equally as large as the black, and again by an Indian in all the war-paint and feathers of a chief, while he was also of gigantic stature.

Loading his gold-dust on pack-horses, the mysterious man was wont to depart, going no one knew whither.

And this was all that could be discovered regarding him from his miners, so Buffalo Bill said:

"We'll camp here and await to see who this mysterious man is."

CHAPTER XXI.

LANDLORD BUNCO'S LITTLE GAME.

THE fact that the mysterious personage acknowledging no name and called only The Unknown, had ridden away at midnight, was not known to the dwellers in Saw Dust City.

Bunco had called up to the cabin to see how he was getting along, after moving into his new quarters, and to offer him any assistance in his power, for the landlord had discovered that his guest asked no questions as to price, and paid promptly, seemingly having unbounded wealth.

Why he should come to Saw Dust City to work a mine, which at the best could pay him but a fair income, was just what Bunco desired to find out.

So he made a call upon the Unknown, to be met at the door by the Chinese, who said that his master was not receiving company that day.

Bunco was disappointed and also chagrined, for he considered himself a kind of mogul in Saw Dust City.

He was certainly the richest man there, unless the Unknown was found to possess more wealth, and he could tell many secrets, while he had a pecuniary claim, a pawnbroker's lien as it were, upon a great many men in the camps.

A dangerous man he certainly was, and for all his smooth manner, was like a hyena when aroused.

The cabin and the Sudden Death looked so prosperous, under the new management, that Bunco regretted that he had not himself taken possession of it, and run the risk of being slain.

"Tell your master that I called, and will always be glad to have him dine with me at the Sinner's Rest," said the landlord, while to make himself "solid" with the Chinese, he drew upon his generosity to the extent of a small piece of gold.

But Bunco got another surprise, as the Chinese said:

"No takee monee; gottee plentee for Chinaman."

"The devill!" quoth Bunco, and as he rode away he muttered:

"A Chinaman refuse gold! well, well! and he says he has got plenty."

"I'll have to know more of this unknown man, that puts on airs and refuses to receive visitors except on certain days."

Now Buckskin Mose did not like him, and seemed to be ready for a quarrel with him.

"The Unknown is quick as lightning, but I do not believe he can get ahead of the Jew, and I'll have to send for Mose to come back and put him on the track of this stranger, while I cultivate his friendship all I can, so that if anything did happen I would have to administer upon his estate."

Now I have an idea, and I will book it for future reference, for it will work well, as we should have a justice here, and I might be that justice—ah! there are the Twins, and I'll have a word with them," and he rode up to the cabin of Buck Bradford and Hank Holden, who were called the Siamese Twins, as they were inseparable.

"Hello, landlord, out for an airing?" called out Buck as Bunco rode up.

"Yes, Buck, have been up to pay my respects to the Unknown."

"You did not see him?"

Bunco was about to say that he did, as he was not anxious to have it known that he had been snubbed; but there was something in the look of the man that told him he knew that he had not seen him, and so he said:

"He was asleep, and I would not let his servants ar. use him, for they said he had been quite ill."

"Who told you that?"

"The Chinese."

"He lied."

"Was he not ill?"

"He is not there."

"Not at home?" asked Bunco in surprise.

"No."

"Where is he?"

"He rode out of Saw Dust City last night, about one o'clock, for Hank and I saw him, and the negro was with him."

"No!"

"It's a fact."

"Well, he's a mystery."

"Yes, and he don't intend to be solved, Bunco."

"Well, we may know something about him some day; but tell me, don't you think Saw Dust City should have a little more law in it?"

"It has the law of might now, with the quickest shot to win the case."

"Yes, but we are growing, and prosperous, and the town should not be run by two or three desperadoes, as it has been in the past, and when a miner dies there should be some one to take full charge of his effects and see that his heirs get them."

"All true, Bunco; but who would be this man?"

"I would be willing to be the judge, while we could elect a jury of twelve men to try all cases, the officers to serve for the term of one year."

"It is not a bad idea, Bunco, and I for one just as soon vote for you for judge as for any other man; but I think a good Vigilance Committee, led by a man of nerve, would keep the judge, jury and all straight as can be expected in a wild mining-camp."

"But start your judge-and-jury ball rolling, and I'll vote for you, and I guess Hank will, too; while, if you don't act square, then I'll start a Vigilance League to hang you."

"That's very fair," joined in Hank Holden.

Bunco smiled in a ghastly sort of way, for he had not thought of being responsible to anybody for his actions as judge; but he was ambitious, and sought to get to the top round of the ladder and at once, for if the Unknown became more popular in Saw Dust City than he then was, he would naturally be selected as the leader.

"Well, boys, I will act, if I'm wanted, and come up and take supper with me to-night, and we'll talk it over."

"Mind you, this is an invitation from me, and I'll expect you."

"All right, judge, we'll be there," said Hank Holden, who, with his comrade, had no idea of missing a good supper at the Sinner's Rest.

Then, pleased with the title, Bunco started on his way back to the hotel, stopping to speak with a number he met and bringing out a hint of the judge and jury scheme.

Arriving at the hotel, he amazed the hangers-on there by asking them to join him in a drink; and thus did he begin his electioneering for place.

Promptly as the gong sounded for supper, Buck and Hank appeared, and, with the other guests invited for the occasion, were ushered into the large eating-hall and placed at the "private table" of the host.

They were given an "appetizer" before supper, and a special effort had been made to tickle their palates.

Buck Bradford knew just what it all meant, as did his pard, and winking at Hank, he said:

"Gentlemen, there is another institution we need in Saw Dust City besides this excellent hotel, its Bonanza Palace store and its mines."

"I believe I can guess what you mean, Buck," said Hank.

"I refer to some mode of law other than that might makes right."

"Now, you all know that the Overlook Mine is my property, and yet, since my uncle died it has been taken possession of several times, and a new party has just moved in to work it."

"Now, I do not care, as I am taking no chances with sudden death; but the right kind of law here would make others let it alone."

"True, Buck, very true, and there should be some law here," said Bunco, eagerly.

"A judge, for instance, and twelve good men for jurymen, that should sit on cases of all kinds," said Hank.

This seemed to be acquiesced in by all, and then Buck said, casually:

"Mr. Bunco, why would you not make a good justice, for you have more property at stake here than any one else, and then you are an educated man, and some have said was once a lawyer?"

"Yes, I was a lawyer, and I suppose once a lawyer, always one," he said, modestly.

Hank here chimed in advocating Bunco as judge, and the others agreeing, it was decided that the five guests should draw up a paper, setting forth the needs of Saw Dust City in a legal point of view, and that Landlord Bunco and twelve others should be elected judge and jury.

A man was then sent through the camps with a bell and to call out, as he rung, that there would be an important meeting at the Sinner's Rest that night for the good of Saw Dust City.

Upon leaving the supper room, Bunco, with magisterial honors in view, treated the crowd assembled there right and left, and gave out in a whisper to many of the confirmed toppers, that if a "certain thing" transpired that night to

his satisfaction, there would be no charge made during the evening for any drinks ordered.

The toppers did not know what it was, but they kept their weather eyes open to see that things should go to please Landlord Bunco.

CHAPTER XXII.

A GHOST AT THE BAR.

NEVER in the history of Saw Dust City had it been known to summon a crowd with a bell.

It was the dinner-bell of the Sinner's Rest Hotel, borrowed for the occasion, and the one who carried it was a hanger-on at the bar, who had been engaged for a week's drinks free to do the ringing.

He saw that the bell drew pretty well, but then there was not excitement enough in it, so he devised a little plan of his own to work better.

Along the crowded street the bell was all right, but then there were men in the back streets who did not answer its call, and the bell-ringer was too lazy for a pedestrian tour through all the camps of Saw Dust City.

His ingenious little plan was to call by something that would bring all within hearing, that they might hear his neat little speech, which was as follows:

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!"

"Come one! Come all!"

"Special and important meeting at the Sinner's Rest Hotel to-night!"

"Don't fail to be there, miners of Saw Dust City, for one and all are wanted!"

Some laughed, others wondered, a few joked him, all questioned, and all decided to be on hand, and the saloon-keepers along the streets, and the rival hotel men, scowled upon the crier, as they felt how their trade would fall off, and the Sinner's Rest business thrive.

But the little plan of the crier?

Ah! it was to fire several shots from his revolver in rapid succession, and then ring his bell furiously.

He knew Saw Dust City nature, and the first report brought a rush, and when one crowd had assembled at the pistol's call, he refrained from trying it again, as he was soundly sworn at for their disappointment, for all had hoped for a deadly encounter, with a funeral to follow.

But he kept up his bell-ringing until the camps had all heard the call, and then hastily wended his way back to Sinner's Rest, where he eagerly took "su'thin' fer his hoarseness."

It was not long before Sinner's Rest piazza, saloon, hallway and the street outside began to be thick with humanity.

An extra force was put on in the bar, and the crowd patronized it to a most liberal extent, while Bunco, smiling and bowing, invited many up to drink with him, and now and then caged an important miner in his room, to talk over the proposed plan.

Buck, Hank and others were also busy, and before very long the bell was rung furiously, and Buck Bradford, who had been chosen speaker for the august occasion, sprang upon a table and thence upon the bar.

A dead silence fell upon all, as the handsome young miner doffed his sombrero, and throwing it at his feet, said in his clear, musical voice:

"Gentlemen and pards! I am happy to see so large a gathering of Saw Dust City's representative men, for we have been called together to-night upon a matter of vital importance to us all.

"Our mines are paying well, our population is growing, our stores are well supplied, and we now have a stage-line bringing us the mail twice a month.

"Then, our hotels are as good as the average, while this one of the Sinner's Rest we all know is an honor to the border, and it is run by a man who knows his business.

"But, gentlemen and pards, there is one drawback, and it is said that we would get a semi-weekly mail were it not that our mountains are too dangerous to run coaches through, and our town too wild a locality for strangers to venture into.

"Then we are ruled here only by the iron arm of might, with no justice to balance the scales, and it is justice that we all want.

"As many of you know I have a mine which others have boldly worked, and there are men here to-day who will walk right over those who can't protect themselves.

"The bowie-knife and revolver are our arbiters, and I say that this should not be in a respectable community.

"We need law, we need a church, we need a jury to try guilty men and a judge to sentence them, and I now propose that we elect officers in whom we have respect.

"What say you all?"

The speech had been listened to with strict attention, and now shouts arose on all sides:

"Right you are!"

"Bully for Buck!"

"Make Buck Bradford judge!"

"We need order!"

"Pards, now is our time for sitting on desperadoes!"

"We need a coroner ter sit on ther men ther jury hangs!"

"Buck Bradford for judge!"

"Ay; Bradford for judge, jury and hangman!"

The young miner here signaled to Bunco to ring the bell for order.

Again there was silence, and the young man said:

"My friends, I heard you mention my name, but it is an honor I do not desire, though I would wish to propose the name of one to whom Saw Dust City owes much.

"He is our richest man, he has the largest hotel, the best store, and he is a progressive man.

"I therefore propose Landlord Bunco for Judge of Saw Dust City!"

Some cheered, a few yelled, others groaned, many hissed, and a perfect pandemonium was the result for a moment, for other names were proposed and a dozen candidates were at once in the field.

But Buck Bradford called for order once more, and proposed that all candidates should be voted for, and he secured pen, ink and paper, selected three witnesses, and then the crowd formed in single file and marched by, each calling out the name of his candidate.

Bunco was at the head of the line, and promptly voted for himself, after which he went among the drunkards and began to electioneer.

The result was that Bunco was elected by a small majority, and he at once ordered the bar to be made free for the night.

A jury of twelve were then selected, Buck Bradford and Hank Holden refusing to serve as jurymen, and then the better class of men in Saw Dust City breathed easier, for it was a start toward putting down the lawless element of the place.

But suddenly, in the midst of the furor over the election, there were cries on the outer edge of the crowd, men began to give way, others rushed from and not toward the scene of commotion, and the hallway was cleared, while cries from within the saloon came asking what was the cause of the disturbance.

Then the men near the door gave way, and the newly elected judge was seen to clear the bar at a leap, and dart out of a rear door, while behind him came a tall, form, a man with a corpse like face, a red mark in the center of his forehead, and walking with a slow, measured step, while his eyes looked straight before him.

"Great God! it is Bowie Ben!" cried Buck Bradford, in amazement.

"It is Bowie Ben's ghost!" came the loud rejoinder, as the weird-looking being stalked up to the bar.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BOWIE BEN'S GHOST.

To say that those in the bar of the Sinner's Rest were amazed at the sudden apparition that strode into the saloon, would be to speak very mildly, for they were terribly frightened.

The bold miners gave way before the "ghost," as they would had been a locomotive on the rampage, and they scattered out of doors and windows with an alacrity that was amusing.

It was a case where each man forgot that he had a revolver, and where, if he had remembered it, would have feared to use one.

Most all there had seen Bowie Ben shot some days before by the Unknown, and they had noticed that the bullet had struck him in the center of the forehead and not glanced.

He had been placed in the rude coffin, prepared for the one who should fall, had been buried, and the party had returned to the camps, wondering at the skill of the strange man who had slain him.

Now, when a meeting was called, to insure better order in Gold Dust City, and all were making merry over the election of a Vigilante judge and jury, in walks what appears to be the dead man himself.

White as death, with the red bullet-mark upon his forehead, noticing no one, his eyes fixed upon vacancy ahead, he walked up to the bar as though to ask for a drink.

But Bunco, the lately elected "judge," had set his bar-men an example, in leaving by the back door, and Rum Charlie, the head dispenser of ardent spirits, had disappeared with his assistants close on the heels of their employer.

So there was no one to serve the "ghost," and those who looked in from the windows and doors saw the apparition seize a bottle with remarkable composure, pour out a glass half full of liquor and then turn and walk straight toward the piazza door.

Those outside gave him all the space a ghost generally is allowed, and he strode down the street, now almost wholly deserted, and walked straight up the hill toward the Sinner's Hope burying-ground.

"Pards, he's gone back to his hole," cried a miner, dashing into the saloon where the crowd were again assembling, but greatly subdued in manner and tone.

All eyes were turned upon the speaker inquiringly, and he said:

"I seen him go down ther street, and I dodged on arter him.

"He tuk ther middle o' ther way, though he

w'u'dn't hev been crowded on their plank walk I'm sart'in.

"Then he turned ther corner at Dead Man's Avenoo, and went straight on up ter Sinner's Hope.

"I didn't follow him up thar, as I feared thar might be a convention o' stiff's going on, and one were too much for my blood; but I seen him go straight to ther cem'try, and I guess he's gone back whar he belongs."

This report was listened to in dead silence, and as the crowd had again collected, and the bar-men had returned to their posts, one man asked:

"Does yer really believe it was Bowie Ben?"

He was looked at with derision, for all knew Bowie Ben well, and there could be no mistake, for hat, boots, weapons, clothes, and even to the red mark in his forehead, it was certainly Bowie Ben.

In that wild region men are prone to superstition, and even in the crowded marts of the East ghost stories are told, and believed by many, so it was no wonder that all there believed the evidence of their own eyes, and that they had seen Bowie Ben in the actual spirit.

"In course it was Bowie Ben, or that is his spirit," said one.

"I guess I knows him," another remarked.

"He looked like a corpse."

"Did yer mind his eyes?"

"Did yer git onto his complexion?"

"And that bullet hole in his head?"

"His hand trembled when he tuk ther drink."

"Rum Charlie, jist throw that bottle and glass away he drunk outer, fer I don't want ter use 'em," and the last remark caused all to echo the advice to the bartender, who said:

"It's already did, fer I chucked 'em out o' ther winder."

"Bully fer you, Charlie."

"But did yer see ther judge dust?" asked one.

"And ther jury went out lively," another remarked.

"They was goin' ter decide whether he were guilty or not guilty o' bein' a ghost."

"Ther judge jumped thet bar like a antelope."

"I thought he'd gone mad with joy at being made a judge when I seen him."

"Yas, ther judge were pretty nimble-footed that time."

Just then Judge Bunco put in an appearance.

He was very pale, but tried to look indifferent, and seeing that something was to be said about his hasty departure, he cut off all remarks by saying:

"Pards, thet ghost left the air chilly, so let us all have suthin'?"

A groan of satisfaction followed this very good suggestion, and Rum Charlie and his aids at once had their hands full.

"What do you think of it, judge?" asked one.

"I think it was Bowie Ben's ghost," was the reply of Bunco, anxious to show good reason for the very nimble manner in which he had cleared the bar and darted out of the rear window.

"Then it's Ben's ghost, ef ther jedge says so," said a miner.

"I wish ther stranger as kilt him had been here."

This idea seemed to please all, and many suggested that the Unknown should at once be informed of the fact that he had more work on his hands.

"We'll go up ter-morrer and dig fer Ben and see if he's thar," said one, while Bunco called to those about to start for the cabin of the Unknown and said:

"Pards, we'll see the grave to-morrow, and then let the Unknown know just what has happened; but don't disturb him to-night."

As he uttered the words the Unknown suddenly strode into the saloon.

He seemed surprised at the hush that fell upon the crowd at his coming, but smiled, bowed, and said in his pleasant way:

"Take something with me, gentlemen."

"No, pard; this is a free night at this bar, for I am the host, so you join me," said Bunco.

"With pleasure, sir."

And the stranger bowed, while Bunco went on:

"The fact is we have decided to have a little government over Saw Dust City, and the boys here have elected me judge and twelve of our good men a jury to sit in trial on cases that come up for the good or bad of the town, so it's open house at Sinner's Rest to-night."

"I congratulate you, Judge Bunco, upon your judgeship, and you, gentlemen, upon having chosen so wisely, and as it is open house at Sinner's Rest to-night I'll drink to our host, the judge."

"It's open house up at Sinner's Hope to-night, too," said one of the miners, referring to the ghost of Bowie Ben.

"Indeed! has there been more grave-digging going on there?" asked the Unknown.

"Oh, no, Pard Unknown; but I'll explain," said Bunco.

And he went on to tell how they had all been surprised at seeing the ghost of Bowie Ben walk

into the saloon, take a drink, walk out and go back to the cemetery.

All eyes were upon the face of the white-haired stranger; but he did not change a muscle as he listened, and then asked quietly:

"Do all of you unite in saying that it was the man I killed?"

"All of us," cried a chorus of voices.

"Not a dissenting voice?"

Not one replied.

"There must be something in it, there certainly is, in fact, which we cannot understand, so I will ride up to the Sinner's Hope and take a look around there."

Many a brave man shuddered at this, for how would he dare go, he who had killed him? they wondered.

"If you'd seen him, pard, you wouldn't go," said Judge Bunco.

"It is to see him that I am going."

"Good-night, gentlemen, and I will report my experience when next I see you," and the Unknown turned and left the saloon.

They saw one of his servants holding his horse for him without, and they noticed that he rode away alone toward the Sinner's Hope, while the man continued on the trail up to the Sudden Death Mine.

"That pilgrim has got too much pluck for one human," said a miner, and this seemed to be the general opinion of all regarding the mysterious stranger, who had boldly gone in search of the strange apparition from which they had fled.

What other comment would have been made regarding him was broken short by the arrival of the semi-monthly stage-coach, which was a most important event in the life of Saw Dust City.

It came in with but one passenger, who, as he advanced into the lighted hall of the hotel, seemed to be recognized, for a shout went up, as a voice called out:

"Deer-Eye Dick is back ag'in!"

"Yes, and he'll be the fu'st case fer ther jedge and jury ter sit on, for he it was who kilt Red Tom," said one, and a deathlike silence followed his ominous words.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TRAILING A GHOST.

WHEN the Unknown rode away from the Sinner's Rest, he ordered his servant to go on to his cabin and have supper ready for his coming, for he had just returned from a long journey.

He was certainly surprised at what he had heard about Bowie Ben's ghost, though he hoped to solve the mystery.

Had they known of his coming at the Sinner's Rest, he might have believed that it was a story gotten up for his benefit to try his pluck; but he felt that such had not been the case, and that the unanimous assent of all showed that there was some mystery in the affair beyond their own and his comprehension.

So he determined to look into the matter for himself.

He would have preferred to await the daylight, but he knew that his hold upon that wild crowd would be stronger if he went by night, and thereby showed his utter fearlessness of consequences.

For this purpose he sent his servant off, to go alone, and, feeling that he was watched, he went directly toward the weird burying-place upon the hill.

It was over half a mile from the nearest cabin, and crowned the apex of a hill, upon which were a number of tall pines, that constantly stirred by the breeze, sung a mournful requiem above the dead.

Without hesitation he rode into the railed in inclosure, and turned his horse directly for the plot which he had established as "his own graveyard," and where he had already planted two of his foes.

He suddenly drew rein, for he was sure that he had seen a dark object skulking along in the shadow of the trees.

"It was a wolf, doubtless," he said, as with revolver in hand, he rode on his way.

His own plot was distant some hundred feet, and it was shadowed by several large trees that grew near.

As he moved on once more he was sure that he saw a form standing on the grave of Bowie Ben.

He drew rein, and looked steadily.

Certainly there stood a tall form, motionless and silent.

Should he dash upon it and open with his revolver?

Even his desperate nature revolted at this, and he determined to ride slowly forward, prepared to fire, if he felt there was cause.

His horse was now restive, and snorting loudly, turned quickly about, as though on a pivot.

In vain did the rider strive to force him on, for he would not go.

Still that strange form remained as he had first beheld it, and as he now sat on his trembling horse and gazed upon it, there seemed to be a weird, strange light stealing over it.

The figure was cast in a kind of halo, and the man, as he glanced upon it, was feeling the painful impress upon him.

"Ah! it is but the rising of the moon," he said, in a relieved tone, as he glanced behind him, and beheld the moon peering over the mountain-tops.

"This accounts for that strange light upon him, but it does not account for him," and he gazed again upon the form.

As the moonlight now fell upon the figure, it was seen to be standing directly over the grave of Bowie Ben, the hands hanging limp to the sides, and the face turned upon the daring man who had intruded there.

"It certainly is the man I supposed I killed; but, Great God! how can he live, for my bullet entered his brain; ay, and I saw him buried, too."

For a long time he sat upon his horse watching the motionless form, and then, as though having made up his mind what he should do, he said aloud:

"If it is a ghost a bullet cannot harm him; but, if by chance the man was not killed, then I shall kill him now."

As he spoke he raised his revolver and urged the animal forward.

The horse, seeing the weapon raised, seemed to gain more confidence, and moving forward halted some thirty paces distant from the weird being.

There he stood snorting wildly.

The moon revealed no movement of the figure, the hands still hung on each side, the face still turned upon the horseman.

Slowly the Unknown brought his revolver to a level and called out:

"Is that you, Bowie Ben, or your ghost?"

No answer came, and the form still remained motionless.

"Speak! Man or ghost, speak, or I fire!"

Still no response, still motionless the upright form remained.

Then came the flash and report of the revolver, and yet no movement of the specter-like being.

"Great God! but I will not be thwarted!"

And shot after shot rung out until the revolver was emptied.

Then the smoke drifted away, and the form yet remained.

With a loud snort the horse wheeled, and deep into his flanks sunk the spurs as his now terrified rider sent him at full speed from the ghastly haunt.

Down the steep hillside he went, keeping clear of the camps, across a meadowland, through the stream, up the mountain-trail to the door of his cabin, where the stranger threw himself from his saddle and entered into the bright light which greeted him.

He was deathly pale, and after pacing to and fro for some time he said to the Chinese, who was there:

"Yellow, where is Sable?"

"Gone to puttee up master's horse," was the answer, with but slight accent.

"And Red?"

"Him in kitchee."

"Tell him to come here."

The Chinese, who was spreading the table for supper for his master, departed, and returned at once accompanied by the Indian chief.

"Red, go on foot to the pale-face burying-ground on the hill above the camps and kill with your bow and arrow any one you see there."

"You must go as though on a trail for a foe, and look for an enemy at the grave of the man I killed there."

"Me know."

"Shoot with your bow and arrow whoever you find there and bring his body here."

"Me know," answered Red and he hastily departed, while the Unknown sat down to the table and endeavored to enjoy the good supper the Chinese had prepared for him.

But he was ill at ease and had no appetite, while he fairly started as the door opened and the negro entered.

Then he was told that Bunco had called upon him during his absence, and others from the camps had been there to ask about him.

To this he paid no attention, and rising from the table passed to and fro with monotonous step until nearly two hours had gone by.

Then came a deep growl from the two dogs without, which instantly subsided as a voice called them by name, followed by the opening of the door.

It was the Indian chief, Red.

"Well, Red, where's your game?" asked the Unknown as the Indian stalked in, bearing no load.

"Me zo kill spirit," was the answer.

"Did you see any one to kill?"

"Me see spirit of dead pale-face."

"Where?"

"At burying-place."

"It was a man."

"Spirit, not man," was the decided response.

"How do you know?"

"Me shoot, he no fall."

"You shot him?"

"Yes."

"What with?"

"Arrow."

"Did you hit him?"

"Oh, yes, hit all right."

"How many times?"

"Heap times."

"And he did not fall?"

"No die."

"How far off were you from him?"

"Very easy arrow-flight."

"Why did you not run on him, then?"

"No, I come here; won't trail spirit no more."

"You saw him distinctly?"

"Same as see chief now."

"Who was it?"

"Spirit of man chief kill at grave."

"You are sure?"

"Me know."

"All right, Red, you can go now; but tell Sable to come to me."

"I'm here, massa," and Sable entered the room, having evidently heard all that had just been said.

"I wish you to go up to the cemetery and—"

"Massa, I hain't goin', sah."

"What?"

"Massa, you knows me, and that I fights a wolf's nest ef you says so; but sperrits hain't in my line, and I doesn't intend ter meddle with 'em until I is one myself."

"No, sah, send dat Chineer nigger, fer he don't believe in sperrits and I does."

The Unknown laughed at the earnest manner of the negro, and said:

"Very well, Sable, I respect the superstition of your race, so ask Yellow to come here."

"Wid pleasure, sah," and Sable followed the Indian, while the Chinese entered a moment after.

"Yellow, I wish you to mount your horse and go to the cemetery for me."

"Killee somebodee?" was the quiet query.

"Yes, there is somebody there playing ghost, so I wish you to go there and make a real ghost of him, and bring his body here."

"Me killee allee right," was the confident rejoinder, and the Chinese left the cabin, and the Unknown heard him ride by soon after upon his mission.

He then picked up a book and tried to read, but his thoughts would wander, and lighting a cigar he sat down to think.

He had surrounded himself with all the comforts to be had on the frontier, and he seemed one to make the best of life.

He was awaiting the return of the Chinese, to see what he would have to say of the apparition, which so far had gotten the best of both himself and the Indian.

He had not expected a return so soon, and started as the rapid clatter of hoofs broke on his ear.

A moment after a horse dashed by toward the stable, and springing to the door the Unknown saw that he was riderless.

This surprised him, and he seemed deeply worried, the smile, which seemed habitual, fading from his face.

He called to Sable and bade him go out to the stable and tell Yellow to come in, for he pretended not to know that the horse had come home riderless.

"Yeller hain't out dere, massa."

"His horse dere, sah, but he hain't nowhar round," was the report.

Before his master could reply there was heard a hurried step without and the next moment Yellow entered the cabin.

His face was an ashen hue, and his eyes were rolling wildly.

"Did your horse throw you, Yellow?" asked the Unknown, quietly.

"No throwee, but run away 'cause see 'Melican ghostee," was the reply, and the Chinese went to the fire, as though he was cold.

"Who saw a ghost?"

"Horse see, me see."

"Where?"

"Upee graveyardee."

"You are sure?"

"Me see with eyes."

"Tell me all about it."

"Me go upee hill, and see 'Melican standee at grave."

"Me callee allee same git outee; but no git outee allee same."

"Me shootee, and no killee; me gittee on ground and shootee; but no killee, 'Melican man live allee same."

"Me shootee some more, and horse run off, and me no likee 'Melican ghostee, for samee me see killee and bury, and so run, too."

"You were frightened?"

"Yes, muchee frighten," was the frank rejoinder.

"All right, Yellow, we will all go some night and catch that ghost."

"You go, massa, wid de red Injun nigger, and de yaller Chineer nigger; but bress de Lord, dis brack nigger don't go," said Black, firmly, and the Unknown laughed; but it seemed to be forced laughter, for he was more impressed than he would admit at all that had occurred.

But as he began to disrobe to retire for the night, he muttered to himself:

"I shall solve that mystery yet, for I cannot, I will not believe in the supernatural."

CHAPTER XXV.

DEER-EYE DICK.

THE reader will remember among the cavalcade introduced as being with Buffalo Bill, in the first part of this story—at the time of the escape of Carter Creighton, by being swept down the torrent—a youth who was known as Deer-Eye Dick.

It was his superb eyes, large, tender, deer-like in expression, which had gained for him among bordermen the rather appropriate *sobriquet*.

For such a youth, with his handsome, almost womanly face, and slender, graceful form, to be out in that wild land seemed strange, for he appeared rather one to belong to city life.

His manners were very gentle and courteous, his face wore a look of almost settled sadness, which his smile rather deepened than brightened, and his words were few, for he seemed to be ever brooding over some secret sorrow.

He was strangely well dressed for the border, and had also won therefor the name of Dandy Dick.

His arms were of the finest, and it was said that he knew how to use them.

Well mounted, well armed, well dressed, bronzed-faced, handsome, and riding with perfect ease, he seemed a *beau ideal* frontier hero of the romance type.

All that was known of him among the party he was then with had been told by his young comrade, Old Nick's Kid, who has been renamed, it will be remembered, Sol; Buffalo Bill, on account of his wisdom, calling him Little Solomon.

Sol had known Deer-Eye Dick in Saw Dust City, as a clerk in the store of Red Tom.

It was said that Red Tom and Landlord Bunco were partners in the Bonanza Palace store, and Deer-Eye Dick had been book-keeper, cashier and general assistant.

Sol said he had seen him taking a horseback ride, and heard that he did so daily, and had very seldom known him to wait on customers in the store.

The miners said that Red Tom thought a great deal of him, and more than this Sol did not know, as soon after Deer-Eye Dick came to Saw Dust City the boy had been kidnapped with Clarice Creighton by Carter Creighton's hirelings, and been a prisoner ever since up at the secret retreat of the Silver Circle League in the Haunted Mountains.

But Hop-Up, the Chinese who had fired upon Carter Creighton, when he was swept away by the torrent, had told Buffalo Bill something of what he knew about the boy.

Hop-Up had been a servant in the Sinner's Hope Hotel, when Room Key Johnny, the desperado "bouncer clerk" was in his prime, and the Chinese had met the scout when he had gone there, to get a clew by which to trace Carter Creighton to his hiding-place in the mountains.

He had also befriended the scout in his visit there, and afterward looked upon Buffalo Bill as his patron.

Most friendly also to Deer-Eye Dick, who had always treated him well, Hop-Up had come to know him quite well, and he had made known to Buffalo Bill, that Red Tom, though seeming to love the boy, had never wanted him out of his sight, and had often scolded him savagely.

Also had the Chinese told the scout that when Deer-Eye Dick had ridden after him, Buffalo Bill, to tell him that he was to be followed by foes, hired by Landlord Bunco, that Red Tom, who had missed him, and demanded to know where he had been, would have beaten the boy upon his refusal to tell, had he not been killed in making the attempt.

"Who killed him?" had asked Buffalo Bill.

"Me killee with knife."

"Ah!"

Then Hop-Up told how he had been in the store and sprung upon Red Tom, driving his knife into his heart, and then had urged Deer-Eye to go with his brother and himself, and he had done so, fearing to get the Chinese in trouble, who declared he would not fly unless Deer-Eye did.

Then the three, Hop-Up, Lick Skillet and his brother, and Deer-Eye Dick had left Saw Dust City and joined the scout in the Haunted Mountains, arriving in time to do good service to aid him in the rescue of Rose Ripley, Clarice Creighton and Sol, from the power of Carter Creighton.

More the Chinese could not tell of the youth, excepting that he had said the money which Red Tom had put in the store in Saw Dust City, in partnership with Landlord Bunco, was his.

Arriving at the fort the strange boy had left it one night with but a note of thanks and farewell to the scout, and from that time Buffalo Bill had not heard of him, nor did he know whether he had gone.

Having endeavored to interest my reader more deeply in Deer-Eye Dick, I will now proceed to account for his presence in Saw Dust City, where he arrived upon the night of the appearance of Bowie Ben's ghost, and where his coming had created such an excitement, for, having left Red Tom dead in his store the night of his flight, over a year before, he had naturally been looked upon as his murderer, and such being the case the wild spirits of the mining-

camp were anxious to have the newly-elected judge and jury begin work at once on a murder trial.

To go back over a year we must follow Deer-Eye Dick upon leaving the fort.

He had started at night, for he sought not to be followed by any one desirous of having him remain or anxious for his safety.

He had declined the parson's offer to carry him East with him, and Buffalo Bill's urging that he should remain at the fort and become a clerk for the sutler.

He had a motive in view, and he did not fear to go alone, for he appeared to be a good plainsman.

A ride of two days through a wild country and following a trail that was very slightly marked brought him in sight of another frontier fort one evening just as twilight was gathering.

"This is Fort —?" he asked of the sentinel, as he rode up to the stockade gate.

"It is, sur," said the Irish man, but American soldier, regarding the handsome youth attentively.

"Is Captain Andrew Dearing here?"

"Yis, sur; he is, sure."

"I would like to see him, for I have come a long way to do so."

"Ride right in, sur, and the corporal of the guard will show you his quarters, and it's meself knows he'll treat yez well, for I'm one o' his company, and it's a dandy gentleman he is, with the best miss for 'atin' on the border."

Deer-Eye saluted and rode into the stockade, his pack-horse trotting at the heels of the animal he rode.

The corporal showed him the quarters—a double log cabin—of the captain asked for, and the youth dismounted near and hitched his horses.

It was now dark, and lights shone from the windows of each room, in one of which a negro servant was visible preparing supper.

Through the open door of the other room, a young officer was visible, seated on a carpet camp-chair, one hand resting upon the table and supporting his head, an attitude of deep thought.

A lamp burned upon the rustic table, and books and papers were scattered here and there, while a sword, rifle, belt of arms and other articles belonging to a military outfit, hung upon the wall.

In one corner was a cot bed, a trunk occupied another corner, a rustic chair, a camp-stool and some clothing hanging on pegs completed the furnishing of the cabin.

The officer appeared a man of thirty, though his face wore a look of dissipation that may have made him appear older than he was.

He was dressed in fatigue uniform, and his cap lay by him upon the table.

The youth stood an instant gazing upon him and then, with a sigh, stepped into the room, at the same time saying:

"Captain Dearing, I believe?"

The officer started at the voice, arose quickly and gazed upon the youth, while in the dim light he did not appear to recognize any one he had seen before.

"Do you not know me, brother Andrew?"

"Good God! Dickie!"

"Yes, I am greatly changed, am I not?" and there was a sneer in the voice and look.

"You are, sadly changed I frankly admit; but what brings you here?"

"I am tired, for I have had a long journey, so may I ask the hospitality of a seat?"

"Take a chair of course, and then tell me why you are here?" and the officer looked worried.

"To see you."

"That is evident; but why?"

"I would know of—of—of those at home?" and the voice choked up with emotion, as the youth spoke of home.

"It is strange that you should think of those at home," and there was a sneer in the officer's tone.

"It may seem strange to you, Andrew, but I do think of them, of father, mother, and often of you, though I have not forgotten that I was cast off by all."

"Do you wonder, after the crime you committed, that we should turn our backs upon you, Dickie?"

"No, and yet I cannot say aught to clear myself."

"Nothing, after what you did, and I am only surprised that you should seek me now."

"It was in the hope that you might forgive me, Andrew, trust me until I—"

"Never! you are nothing to me, or to my parents now."

"You are—bah! I lose patience in talking to you as I see you as you are now, and I wish to find you had not come near me."

"I shall not offend you again; but one question?"

"What is it?" impatiently asked the officer.

"Is my father yet alive?"

"He is."

"And our mother?"

"She is alive, though almost broken-hearted at your act."

"Good-by, brother Andrew."

"Where are you going?"

"Out of your sight."

"When did you come?"

"Only a few moments since."

"Where from?"

"Fort —."

"What were you doing there?"

"I went there with some friends."

"Your friends?" and the man sneered again.

"Yes, one of them was Buffalo Bill."

"Hal! do you know him, for he is my friend?"

"Yes, I know him, and he told me where to find you."

"And does he know that—"

"Do not be alarmed, Andrew, for he knows nothing about me."

"Thank God for that; but where do you go from here?"

"Wherever the humor pleases me," was the haughty reply.

"There is a train going to Helena in two days, and you can go with that, while I will get you quarters, and you can occupy the cabin next to me, which is vacant, and my servant shall give you your meals there; but remember, not a word as to my being your brother, or that you are other than one I have met before."

"You need have no fear, for I shall not be in your way, nor accept your forced hospitality, for I have a place to go," and the youth turned away, looked back wistfully, and then said:

"Good-by, brother."

The officer made no reply, but stood for some moments in painful reverie.

Then he said:

"This is cruel treatment, and I will not be guilty of it."

Hastily he left his cabin in search of the missing youth; but to all inquiries he learned that he had left the fort alone, and upon this came the startling words:

"And the Indians are abroad in big force to-night, sir, so a scout just reported."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PONY EXPRESS RIDER.

WHEN Deer-Eye Dick left the cabin of his brother whose heart seemed so hard against him, he went out to where he had left his horses, sprung into the saddle and rode at once toward the gate of the stockade.

The same sentinel was on duty who was there when he entered, and he asked:

"Is you afther going so soon, sur?"

"Yes, my man."

"Did you see our captain?"

"Yes; I saw him."

"And it's not like him to let you go away, sur."

"I go of my own free will, my man; but there comes some one riding like the wind."

"It's one o' thim scouts, sur, and he's got news or he'd niver ride like that."

And the soldier called out as the horseman approached:

"Halt! who comes there?"

"It's me, Barney, and I've news for the colonel, so let me pass quick," said a cheery voice, while, as the man rode forward and caught sight of Deer-Eye Dick, he continued:

"Ho, pard! you are not going out to-night?"

"Yes."

"Don't you do it, for there are Indians about in big force, and you'll be scalped."

"I'll take the chances," was the quiet reply of the youth, as the scout dashed on into the stockade.

"Howly Moses! is yez afther going afther he has told yez the red nagurs was on ther pararer, sur?"

"Yes; I prefer to risk death rather than remain here. Good-night!"

And Deer-Eye Dick rode on his way.

He was alert, however, for any danger that might confront him, and having seen the direction the scout had come from, he thought that the Indians naturally would be in that locality, so he flanked the fort and pressed on toward a distant range of hills he saw outlined against the sky.

By strange good luck he passed through the marauding bands of red-skins, and keeping on his way until after midnight felt that he must camp for the sake of his horses as well as himself, for all were very tired.

In the darkness he found a cosy nook in the hills, and staking his animals out after watering them at a rivulet near, the gurgle of which told him of its presence, he ate his supper quietly and lay down to rest.

The sun peering through the trees awakened him the next morning, and, greatly refreshed, he arose, watered his horses, gave them a good rubbing down and changed them to a fresh pasture, after which he kindled a fire and cooked his breakfast of bacon, coffee and crackers.

Taking out a map, he then studied his way, as to where he wished to go, and soon after started on his trail, the horses, thoroughly rested, going along at a swinging pace.

Thus a couple of days passed, and he reached a border settlement and sought a tavern, where he put his horses up, telling the landlord that he wished them to remain a few days, while he took the next stage eastward.

It was the evening of his second day's stage-ride that he was put down in an Iowa town

and, as though acquainted with the place, he wended his way toward the outskirts, stopping at the gate of a large and handsome residence.

He hesitated at the gate for some time, as though not knowing whether to go in or retrace his way.

It was a comfortable home, surrounded by large and handsome grounds, and overlooking a fine landscape of valley and hill-land.

A light burned in one wing of the house, but all else was dark and gloomy.

"Dare I go in?" he asked himself, after waiting some time in hesitancy.

Suddenly a voice from the piazza, evidently coming from one who was seated there, and had seen him, and wondered at his delay, called out:

"Who is that?"

Instantly he walked along the gravel path to the house, and approaching the piazza, beheld a lady seated there in an easy-chair.

"Mother, it is your poor Dickie!" came in trembling accents from the boy's lips.

Instantly the woman was on her feet, and cold and stern was her voice, strangely like her soldier son's tones, as she said:

"I have no such child now, for I have torn the name from my heart."

"Mother, hear me!" pleaded the boy, standing with head uncovered before the woman, who had risen and was looking down upon him with a cold and merciless expression, for the light from the window fell upon her face as she stood there.

"Hear you! dare you ask me, coming to me as you now are?"

"I do ask it, mother, I do ask if you cannot forgive the past?"

"Never!"

The youth remained silent and motionless as a statue.

"I can never forgive you after what you did, the ruin, the disgrace you brought upon me and all of our name."

"Mother, would father say the same, think you?"

"I know that he would," was the haughty reply.

"Where is father?"

"Up in the town; I was sitting here awaiting him when I saw you halt at the gate, though I little dreamed that it was you."

"Mother, I sought brother Andrew, at the fort, and I asked him to forgive and trust me."

"And he refused?"

"He did."

"His pride has been too keenly touched by your disgracing us all to forgive."

"And father has said nothing?"

"What could he say but to condemn?"

"Mother, this burden is almost harder than I can bear."

"You put it upon your own shoulders, and if it crushes you, you have only yourself to condemn," was the cold reply.

"Mother, I plead no more; but some day, mark my words, mother, *some day* you will regret your words, as will also my brother Andrew."

"God bless you, mother, and soften your heart ere you die."

"Good-by, mother," and the youth turned sadly away.

The woman half-bent toward him, her lips quivered, as though about to call his name, her form trembled, as though the matter in her heart was exciting itself to make her break down her haughty mien; but she checked herself and turned away, while Deer-Eye Dick, looking back a moment, as he reached the gate, went on his way with head bowed down in grief.

Soon he heard the rumble of wheels, and a horse and buggy appeared in sight.

"I know old Whitey," muttered the youth, and he stepped out into the road and holding up his hand called out:

"Father, hold!"

There came a flash and report almost instantly, the whip descended upon the horse, and the one in the buggy sped on.

"Great God! my brother and mother have disowned me, and my father took me for a highwayman, and his bullet barely missed my head."

"Oh! had he killed me, what bitter remorse would have been his."

"Ah me! I am but an outcast, and I must continue on my way alone in the world."

So saying he walked rapidly back into the town, reached the hotel, just as the westward-bound stage drove up, and buying his seat was soon on his way back to the border.

Arriving at the tavern in the little settlement, where he had left his horses, Deer-Eye Dick decided to rest several days, for he was pretty well worn out by his hard trip, and, while resting, to come to some conclusion as to his future course, for he had but a few hundred dollars left and knew that he must do something for a living.

Seated in front of the hotel one afternoon he heard the clatter of hoofs, and up dashed the Pony Express Rider, reeling in his saddle, for he was bleeding from several wounds.

"Pony Pete, in Heaven's name what are ther

matter?" cried the landlord, springing to his side and catching him in his arms.

"Shot by road-agents! but quick, send my mail-bags on by some one!" groaned the young Pony Rider.

"Lordy, Pony Pete, thar hain't a soul ter send, fer—"

"Then I must go if I die on the way," was the plucky reply.

"No, no, you are severely hurt and I will go, if you will only tell me what I am to do."

It was Deer-Eye Dick who spoke, and he sprung to the side of the Pony Rider, who was now lying upon the hotel piazza, supported by the landlord, who had sent a servant flying after the only doctor in the settlement.

"Pard, you look Pony Rider clean through, and you can do it."

"Mount my fresh horse there, and he'll take you to the next station, fifteen miles away, and if you can stand it, the next horse will carry you the rest of the run."

"I'll do it."

"I thank you; but now be off, and tell the boss I've got three bullets in me, but hope to pull through," and the Pony Rider spoke with difficulty, while he held out his hand, which Deer-Eye Dick grasped warmly and then mounted the fresh horse in waiting.

The animal sprung off like an arrow from the bow, and Deer-Eye Dick soon saw that all he had to do was to keep on his back.

Up hill, down hill, across a flat, along a ridge, through a valley, flew the horse, going like the wind.

Not a cabin in sight, not a human being met with, only that deep loneliness as the horse sped on along the Pony Express Rider's trail.

At length the animal dashed up to a lonely hut in the hills, and a man stood there with another horse, bridled and saddled.

"Where's Pony Pete?" he asked.

"Wounded by road-agents."

"Sorry; you ride for him?"

"Yes."

"Ridden Pony Express before?"

"No."

"You are lightning for a greenhorn and ahead o' time—good-by."

Deer-Eye Dick nodded and the horse bounded away.

On, on he flew, and after a ten-mile run came to a scattering settlement, for here and there was a cabin.

But the well-trained animal held on until he dashed up to the door of a border tavern, standing amid a group of smaller houses.

A man sprung to meet Deer-Eye Dick, while another Pony Rider stood at the head of his horse.

"Here, Bob," cried the man, tossing the mail-bags to the Pony Rider, who threw them across his saddle and was off like a flash.

Then the man turned to Dick:

"Where's Pony Pete?"

"Wounded by road-agents before reaching Mountain City, where he now is."

"And you?"

"Volunteered to take his place."

"You came in a minute ahead of time."

"I am light weight," was the modest reply.

"You ride well, for I watched you crossing the valley and coming up here—ever ride Pony Express before?"

"No, sir."

"What are you doing now?"

"Nothing, sir, for I am out of work."

"Then you are my man, if you'll take Pony Pete's place, for, if he gets well, it will be a long time first, and if not you can keep it."

"I'll take it, sir."

"Your ride is from here to sixty miles the other side of Mountain City, and you make eight changes of horses, going east by night and coming west by night, a trip every other day and night, and one hundred dollars a month pay."

"What do you say?"

"I'll take it, sir, and thank you, while I have two good horses at Mountain City," and that night Deer-Eye Dick, at once called Pony Dick, started back on his ride as a Pony Express Rider.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RESCUE.

It seemed the mysterious owner of the gold mine in the Haunted Mountains, because Buffalo Bill and his party were waiting for his arrival, did not intend to come as was his custom, for after a couple of weeks passed there, as he did not appear, the scout decided to wait no longer.

"If he is the one we are after, he has been informed of our presence here in some way, and so keeps away," said Buffalo Bill.

"Not a miner has left the camps though to inform him, that is certain," Frank Powell remarked.

"No, we have kept an eye upon them, and our coming here has at least brought forth good results, for we have found that the mine pays well, and more, it is surely the discovery, parson, of your son, Roy Ripley, and whoever the owner is he must give it up. Is he Carter Creighton or not," the scout said, firmly.

"And where will you go now?" asked the parson.

"To Mountain City, which is on the Pony Express line, and where you remember we told them at the fort to send any letters or communications for us," the scout answered, and then saying that they would break camp in the morning, Buffalo Bill and Doctor Powell walked over to the mining-camp to see the "boss" of the mine.

"Well, pards, ther cap'n hain't come yet," he said, as they walked up to his cabin.

"No, and I think he has some motive for keeping away; but if so, it will do him no good, for I shall find him, as I have made up my mind to do so."

"Oh, he's squar', pard, and don't you forgit it, fer he don't seem ter be one as was dodgin' iron bars and hangman's ropes."

"He's got army discipline about him, and won't be fooled with; but I think he's not wrong in anything, and like as not you're on the wrong trail, and the old man hain't the one you are arter."

"Is he an old man?" asked Doctor Powell.

"Yes; he's well along in years."

"About how old?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Waal, I should say nigh onter what the Bible calls three-score and ten."

"What! nearly seventy?"

"Yes, pard; he's got whiter hair and beard than your old pard with you, but he's spry in his movements."

"Well, we are going to break camp in the morning, so good by."

And Buffalo Bill and Powell turned away, the former remarking as they went back toward their camp:

"We have been on the wrong trail after all, doctor, if that man tells the truth."

"So it would seem, for Carter Creighton is comparatively young, is he not?"

"Hardly over thirty-eight, I should say."

"Then two weeks are gone; but I would not say aught to the parson of our doubts, as it will worry him the more."

"But which way will you go now?"

"As I said, to Mountain City, on the Pony Express trail, after letters, and then to Saw Dust City."

"We may find out something there."

And as they reached camp they stopped discussing the matter, and, packing up, had all ready for an early start the next morning.

It was the afternoon of the second day when they came down from the mountains, following a river that ran through a valley.

"Do you see yonder ridge of timber?" asked Buffalo Bill, pointing to a heavily-wooded range of hills not far away.

"Well," he continued, as all assented, "the Pony Express trail runs along there, and we will strike a path leading up to it, and it is then but seven miles to Mountain City."

"This is considered the worst part of the trail, as the road-agents always make their attacks on the Pony Riders about here, it being so easy for them to retreat back to the hills."

"There are valuable mails run by here for Mountain City that do not go beyond, and the road-agents know it, and a Pony Rider who runs this part of the trail has got to be full of nerve and know just what he is about, for his life is in deadly peril."

"It is a hard life the Pony Riders lead, as well as one full of danger," Frank Powell remarked, while Sol joined in with:

"I think I'll take to pony-riding, Mister Bill, as I'm light weight and tough as a pine-knot, and when I git too big for the work I kin join you in scouting."

"A good idea, Sol, and you can get a couple of years as a Pony Rider before you outgrow the requisite weight, after which you will be better fitted for a scout— But hark!"

All listened, and the rapid rattle of hoofs was heard along the ridge.

"Come, we can reach the ridge in time to see him flash by, for it is the Pony Rider," and Buffalo Bill led the way at a gallop.

As they began the ascent of the ridge, there suddenly rung out a loud command:

"Halt, or die!"

A pistol-shot followed, then another, and then a cheer in half a dozen hoarse voices, while one cried out:

"We've got him, pards, and the paymaster's dust is ours."

At the very first sound of a voice above on the ridge, Buffalo Bill had taken in the situation, and called out:

"Come! the road-agents have caught the Pony Rider!"

Leaving the pack-animals loose, to follow, the four had spurred forward up the hill, and a moment after the halting of the Pony Rider, they dashed upon the scene.

The road-agents were surprised, but they stood their ground, for the Pony Rider carried a valuable booty, in the paymaster's money to pay off the men on the line, and they meant to fight for it.

There were seven of them, and one lay wounded in the road, having fallen under the Pony Rider's shot, while a horse, also brought down by the same hand was lying dead on the trail.

The horse of the Pony Rider had been caught by a lariat, and was held fast, while his master had been pulled from his saddle and the leather pouch was in the hands of the leader of the road-agents as Buffalo Bill and his comrades dashed up.

The outlaws turned, opened a scattering fire, but seeing who their assailants were a voice who knew them yelled out in alarm:

"Pards, it's Buffalo Bill and Doc Powell, the Surgeon Scout, so we must git!"

Then the revolvers of Buffalo Bill and Frank Powell began to rattle, and in the confusion the Pony Rider struck the outlaw leader over the head with his revolver, snatched his leather bag, threw it across his saddle, cut the lariat that held his horse and mounted.

"Bravo, Buffalo Bill, and thank you."

"I must be on time, so good-by!"

Away he dashed down the trail, just as Buffalo Bill and the others dashed up and the scout's voice rung out:

"Hands up, agents!"

Two of the band had rushed for their horses and escaped, but with two of the remainder dead and one wounded, the others threw their hands above their heads and sung out lustily for quarter.

The prisoners were quickly disarmed, the wounded man, after being examined by Doctor Powell, and pronounced not fatally shot, was swung upon a blanket hung on poles, and his four outlaw comrades made to carry him along the trail toward Mountain City Station.

It was just dark when they arrived there, and they found the little settlement quite excited, for Pony Dick had told of the attack upon him, and that he had been rescued by Buffalo Bill and some comrades.

The prisoners were jailed at once, for trial, and Buffalo Bill and his comrades received a warm welcome from the settlers, and the hospitality of the tavern was extended to them.

"Landlord, who was the Pony Rider we helped out?" asked Buffalo Bill, who had recognized Deer-Eye Dick in the moment that he had seen him.

"His name is Pony Dick, and that's all we knows about him, Pard Bill."

"He's been on the Express trail about a year, I guesses, and took the place of Pony Pete, who was killed by road-agents."

"He's a flyer, and full of pluck, is Pony Dick, never late on his runs, and storm or shine, day or night, never misses; but he told me he was going to draw off for a while at least, and see if he could not get some money was due him somewhere."

"We will find him at the other end of his run, I guess?"

"Yes, for he don't go out until to-morrow night, when he comes through here at ten o'clock."

"We will see him there, for we go that way, or can do so."

"Well, you saved the company big money this time, as Pony Dick carried some thirty thousand dollars, I heard."

"I am glad we happened to strike the trail on time," and the scout went to his room, telling the landlord they wished to make an early start in the morning.

It was noon when they arrived at the end of Pony Dick's run, to find, to their surprise and regret, that the young rider had ended his rides, the day before being his last, and had started at dawn that morning, on his own horse, for some other point, but where no one knew.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DEER-EYE DICK MEETS A FRIEND.

It was true that Pony Dick had given up his riding on the Express trail.

He had stuck to it manfully, won the approbation of the employers, and the admiration of all along the line, for his pluck, endurance and never having been behind time.

He had saved up his money, his salary having been increased, on account of the dangers of his run and his good record, and, with more than a thousand dollars to his credit, he felt that he could look up some other employment more suited to his tastes, for the youth did not like the wild life he led and wished to leave the border.

So he received his pay, got his traps together and mounted upon his own splendid horse Flyer, set out at dawn the very morning that Buffalo Bill left Mountain City to find him.

He had recognized the scout at a glance, as he did also the others, for besides having seen the parson and Sol a year before, he had met Doctor Powell when the latter had been stationed not very far from Saw Dust City.

But for some reason he cared not to see them again and hastened his departure after having finished his last run on the Pony Express trail.

What had brought Buffalo Bill and his three companions to that part of the country Deer-Eye Dick could not comprehend, for he had believed the parson was East with his grand-daughter, the Wild Rose.

But he did not care to remain to see them, for he thought the scout would try to find him, and

he pushed on his way to Saw Dust City, which was the destination he had in view.

It was when within a few miles of Saw Dust City one afternoon that he came upon Ned Talbot, the Overland stage-driver, who drove into the mining-camps and back twice each month.

One of Ned's leaders had fallen and severely hurt himself, and having a heavy load on, though no passengers, the driver was in a quandary when Deer-Eye Dick rode up and seeing the situation, said:

"I'll throw my traps on the stage, Ned, and you can hitch Flyer in."

The driver knew the youth, having often seen him in the store, and he was well aware that he was accused of being the murderer of Red Tom, so he said:

"All right, Deer-Eye, and I'm glad you come; but whar is yer jist from?"

"Oh, I've been wandering around the border and riding Pony Express," was the answer.

"Hain't been ter Saw Dust City lately, have yer?"

"No; but I'm going there now."

"Better not, Deer-Eye."

"Why?"

"Well, they says you kilt Red Tom, and they will make it red-hot for you."

"Well, they say wrong, for I did not kill Red Tom."

"It looked like it, Deer-Eye, for you skinned out the night he got a knife put in his heart."

"I admit that, but I did not kill him, and I am going back to Saw Dust City to get that which belongs to me."

"My advice is, don't go."

"I thank you, Ned Talbot, but I feel a clear conscience as to the killing of Red Tom, and so I shall go."

"Who did kill him, then?"

"I saw him killed, and if I am forced to tell, I will do so; but let us see how Flyer will work in the lead," and the youth's horse was hitched up in the place of the crippled animal.

Flyer did not seem to like the change, though his good sense apparently gave him an inkling as to the necessity, and he started off at a good gait.

The crippled animal was left to follow as best he could, though Deer-Eye Dick suggested that the wolves would doubtless attack him.

"Maybe, my boy; but they won't be more cruel than will Bunco and them in Saw Dust City, to you, I'm afraid."

"I've got to take my chances, Ned, and it is worth it, for I've got ten thousand dollars in that Bonanza store, and I want it."

"Dick, has you gone clean mad?" asked the surprised driver.

"No, for it is true, as Red Tom put my money into the store, in partnership with Bunco, and I've got the papers to prove it."

"Whar did you git all that money, Deer-Eye, and you a boy?"

"My father gave it to me."

"Waal, he put you in bad hands when he left you to Red Tom."

"I know that but too well; but I left home under circumstances which I will not make known, and Red Tom took charge of me."

"We came to Saw Dust, with a stock of goods he had bought, and Bunco got Red Tom to go into partnership with him."

"The papers were drawn up, and I have them. Ned Talbot, and I want my money, and then I can go East, far from these wild scenes and wilder people, and live in peace and comfort."

"That's so, Deer-Eye, for you hain't no person to be out here on ther border, as you seems more like a woman in yer manners than a border kid."

"But I hopes you'll git yer money, Deer-Eye, and I'll do what I kin ter help yer, though one ag'in' hundreds hain't much good."

"Thank you, Ned, but don't get yourself into trouble on my account."

"You has grit, that's sart'in," and the good-hearted driver drove on, and a couple of hours after the stage rolled up to the door of the Sinner's Hope Hotel.

That Ned Talbot had spoken the truth, in warning Deer-Eye Dick, the latter at once discovered from the reception that he met with, for he was at once set upon, accused of the base murder of Red Tom, and then came the cry:

"Now let Judge Bunco and his jury try him for the crime."

CHAPTER XXIX.

SAW DUST CITY "JUSTICE."

FOR a moment, after entering the Sinner's Hope Hotel, Deer-Eye Dick regretted that he had come to Saw Dust City, and not taken the advice of the honest stage-driver and remained away.

He saw about him a mass of wild humanity, and knew them to be men who knew no law.

The driver, Ned Talbot, had left his team to the stable boys, for it was beneath a driver to look after the horses himself, and more, he was anxious to see what would become of the brave youth.

So he hastened into the hotel and the scene that met his gaze was by no means an encouraging one for poor Deer-Eye Dick.

After the recognition of the youth as the for-

mer clerk in the Bonanza Palace Store, and recalling the fact that he had killed, as was said, Red Tom, he was seized by Bunco, who at once called out:

"As judge of these mining-camps I arrest this young man, as a murderer."

A yell greeted these words, for there were a number of the men who were under the influence of liquor, and were just ugly enough to wish to see the youth tried and executed within the next few minutes.

"Upon what charge do you arrest me, Bunco?" was the calm question of the youth.

"Murder," and a silence fell upon all.

"Who am I accused of murdering?" came the question in the same quiet voice, though the youth was very pale.

"Red Tom, your boss."

"I am not guilty."

"Well, we'll see if you are, and we'll see pretty soon, for you must know, Deer-Eye Dick, that there's law in Saw Dust City now."

"Do you represent the law, Bunco?" and Deer-Eye Dick smiled.

"I do."

"He's jist been made jedge, Deer-Eye, and I guess he'll sentence you afore you is a night older," said one of the crowd.

"I have committed no crime, and you have no witness against me."

"I left here because I wished to do so, and I have come back to claim that which is my own. Judge Bunco, and I have no doubt that you will be very anxious to get me out of the way."

"Pards, this youth should be tried at once, and I move the judge and the jury adjourns to the dining-room and sets on his case to-night," said Bunco.

"No, have an open trial," called out one.

"Yes, you decides, but we hears the evidence."

"Courts hain't secret."

"No Vigilante work, but all open."

"Yes, open court."

"Open court," and the last two words were upon every tongue, and Bunco was convinced that he could have no "secret session" of the trial.

So he said:

"Pards, you are right, the trial should be open; only I thought we would give him a hearing first."

"Well, let it be here," said a miner.

This was decided upon, and a table was arranged at one end of the saloon, near the hotel door, and behind it sat Bunco, pen, ink and paper before him, with the belt of arms taken from the prisoner, who was seated at the right of the "judge," and up in the corner.

On the left of Bunco sat the twelve jurymen, and before this august court (!) were the miners, some seated on chairs and tables, some on the bar, others standing and a few looking in at the windows and door opening upon the piazza.

Behind Bunco was the door leading into the hotel, for he always allowed himself a "getting-out place," in case of trouble.

Rapping vigorously upon the table, the "judge" called the court to order, while Buck Bradford said in a whisper to Hank Holden:

"That boy's face haunts me, and always did, when I saw him once or twice in the store."

"I tell you, Hank, he must have fair play shown him."

"So I say, Buck; but see how Bunco swells up with importance, and listen to him," answered Hank Holden.

"Gentlemen, I declare this august court open for duty," cried Bunco, in a pompous tone.

"Hear! hear!" yelled the crowd.

"The duty before us is to try the prisoner at the bar—"

A yell of laughter broke forth at the very apropos application, as the prisoner was leaning against the saloon bar.

"Silence!" roared Bunco, and instantly all were silent, and he continued:

"The prisoner is charged, with the cold-blooded murder of my late dear and lamented friend, Thomas Reddington, known here better under the name of Red Tom."

"All things point to his guilt, and if proven, it is our duty to find him so and sentence him accordingly."

"The trial will now be commenced by the statement of the facts in the case."

"One word, jedge."

All eyes turned upon the speaker, as he suddenly advanced before the judge.

"Well, sir?" said Bunco, frowning at the interruption.

"Who is going to plead for the boy?"

"He can plead for himself."

"That hain't business, jedge, and I says so."

"That boy looks squar' from heel ter head, he went away at the time of ther murder, and you says he was guilty."

"But he were coming back here without fetching, and more, he would come though I told him to stay away."

"Now that don't look like guilt, and as he did me a sarvice to-day, I'm willing to do something for him, and so I says let him git some one to defend him in this case."

"Business! that's business!" yelled a score of

voices, more anxious to see who would defend him than to have him aided by any defense that might be made.

"Do you wish to have a lawyer appointed by the court to defend you?" asked Bunco.

"No; for you would appoint one who did me more harm than good," came the pat reply, and some one without the fear of justice in him yelled out:

"He's onter you, judge."

"Silence!" yelled Bunco, and then he continued sullenly:

"Then select some friend to defend you."

"I have no friend," was the sad response.

"You are mistaken, for I am your friend and will take your case!"

And Buck Bradford stepped forward, while a yell went up by way of applause.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRIAL.

THE act of Buck Bradford, in stepping forward to defend Deer-Eye Dick, against the accusation of having murdered Red Tom, created a sensation.

The young miner was known as a good talker, and that he was brave there could be no doubt, though he kept away from the crowds.

"Do you accept Buck Bradford as your lawyer?" asked Bunco, turning to the prisoner.

Deer-Eye Dick's face had flushed at seeing Buck Bradford step forward, and then it grew very pale, and he dropped his head for an instant; but in answer to the query of Bunco he replied:

"May I ask Mr. Bradford why he offers to defend me?"

The young miner seemed surprised at the question, but answered frankly:

"Because I am not one to see the helpless beaten, if I can help it, and I do not believe you guilty of the crime charged, while if you were, I feel that you had good reason for killing the man, and you certainly did good service to this community."

"Besides, I have taken a strange interest in you, and somehow you remind me of one I once knew."

"These are my motives."

Deer-Eye Dick looked straight in the face of the handsome young miner for a moment, and seemed satisfied in his own mind, regarding any suspicion he had had, and said:

"I thank you, sir, and accept your services with pleasure."

Buck Bradford at once took a chair over near the prisoner, and Bunco, who evidently did not like the idea of the youth having any friend to defend him, said sternly:

"Now let this trial go on."

"Well, sir, make your charges," Buckner Bradford said.

"I charge that on the evening of September the sixth, one year ago, my much lamented friend, Thomas Reddington, was stabbed to the heart by the prisoner, who left him dead in his store and took flight, after having robbed the store of certain sums of money and articles of merchandise which he carried with him."

"He was sought for at the time of his escape, but could not be found, and now that he has returned to Saw Dust City, he should suffer for his crime of murder."

"Prisoner, you have heard the charge against you?" said Buck Bradford, at once coming to the point.

"I have."

"What have you to answer to it?"

"Not guilty."

"State to the court the circumstances of your leaving."

"I rule against this, for naturally the prisoner will not tell the truth," said Bunco, eagerly.

"The prisoner has a right to be heard."

"You have made a charge of murder against him, and he must be heard in his own defense, and then you are to prove what is true and what is not."

"That's squar'," yelled a voice, and the others chiming in, Bunco saw that he had to let the prisoner speak.

Then Deer-Eye Dick arose and said, in a voice that all heard:

"I came to Saw Dust City with the man they called Red Tom."

"Where we came from it matters not; but I was under his charge, by my father's will, and I was also given ten thousand dollars at the time I left home with Red Tom."

"He had no money to speak of, and invested mine in a lot of goods and groceries for a frontier store and we came here."

"Bunco then had just built his store adjoining, and he proposed a partnership, and Red Tom agreed; but the papers were drawn up in my name, and I have them now in my possession, I being the real partner, though he was supposed to be and he got the benefits as such."

"I was the book-keeper and cashier, as many here may know."

"One day I left the store to visit a friend, and Red Tom was furious when I returned, and, because I would not tell him just what I had been doing, he threatened to kill me."

"And where had you been, and what doing?" asked Bunco.

"I will tell you."

"You all remember a stranger who came here one night over a year ago?"

"He was handsome as a picture, and Room Key Johnny took him in tow, and afterward tried to kill him, aided by a desperado pard of his."

"The stranger, you remember, left the next morning, but he left the two desperadoes gagged and bound in this hotel."

"The night following his departure those two men started on the stranger's trail to kill him, and three others whom you all knew, called The Triplets, were hired to kill that stranger."

"He had once done me and mine a service, and so I wished to save him, and I rode up the valley and warned him."

"You are aware that neither Room Key Johnny nor his pard ever returned, nor were The Triplets seen in Saw Dust City afterward, so my warning must have done some good."

"It was because I would not tell where I had been, and what doing, that Red Tom threatened to kill me, but as he made the attempt one whom I did not know was present sprung from behind the counter and drove his knife into the heart of the storekeeper."

"Who was it?" cried Bunco, furiously.

"As he is safe, and will not return here, I do not mind telling you."

"It was Hop Up, the Chinese!"

A murmur ran through the room, and Deer-Eye Dick continued:

"I urged the Chinese to fly, but he would not go unless I did, as he said I would be accused of the murder."

"So I decided to go, and he went after his brother, Lick Skillet, who was the servant of the three men known as The Triplets, and then away on that stranger's trail."

"I took some money from my trunk, some papers and what I needed from the store in the way of provisions, ammunition and blankets, and I took my two horses with me."

"Of what the store held half was mine, so I committed no robbery, and I have been away, riding Pony Express, most all the time, until a few days ago, when I decided to come back here and claim my own."

"That is my story, gentlemen of the jury."

As Deer-Eye Dick sat down a silence that could almost be felt rested upon all.

His handsome, sad face and frank manner had won over many to believe he told the truth; but there were many more who did not believe in any truth or honesty, and they did not care to have a tragic scene spoiled, and they wished to see the youth punished.

As for Bunco he was astounded at the boy's story, though he knew he told the truth in the main.

He had not allowed any one to know that Red Tom owned a dollar in the store, or any one else, and led all to believe it was all his.

But Deer-Eye Dick's story would prove that he had been but half owner, and more, that he had been getting all the benefits since the man's death.

All remembered the running off of the two Chinese brothers, but no one had connected their going with Deer-Eye Dick's flight.

So the idea of Bunco was to show that the youth charged the absent Chinese with the crime to save himself, and told the story of his owning the half of the Bonanza Palace Store to try and make capital for himself.

Seeing that a number believed the youth, Bunco determined to act promptly, and so said:

"Gentlemen of the jury, you have heard the prisoner's statement, and I pronounce it false from beginning to end."

Then Buck Bradford arose and said in his pointed way:

"Judge, this seems to have simmered down to a question of veracity between you and the prisoner, so, to prove your case, you will be willing to answer some questions?"

"I am the justice here, sir, and not on trial," was the angry retort.

"Then as judge you should be just and answer some questions I wish to put to you."

"That's so!" came in a howl from the crowd, and Bunco said:

"What do you want ter ask?"

"Do you not remember that two Chinamen left Saw Dust City the night of Red Tom's murder?"

"Every fool remembers that."

"Certainly, well, as you remember it, can you not recall that they were suspected at first of killing Red Tom, then putting Deer-Eye Dick out of the way in some mysterious manner, and of robbing the store?"

"Some said they might have done it, but I never believed it, and I found out afterward the boy did it."

"You thought so, and so did others; but now to the story of the prisoner owning half of the store?"

"It is a lie."

"Here, sir, look over these papers," and Deer-Eye Dick handed a package of papers to Buck Bradford.

Bunco sought to intercept them, but Buck Bradford said:

"Hold, judge! don't do that, for I won't stand it."

A glance at the papers showed him what they were and he said in his calm, distinct way:

"Here is a paper which is a partnership drawn up between Landlord Bunco and Dickie Reddington, in which each owns half of the Bonanza Palace Store, while Red Tom is to have the receipts of the profits on Dickie Reddington's half, but not to touch the principal."

"This is signed by Bunco and Dickie Reddington, and witnessed by Red Tom," and turning to the youth he asked:

"Are you Dickie Reddington?"

"I am."

"And the man Red Tom, for his name was Thomas Reddington?"

"We were nearly connected," was the response.

"That is nonsense, for that boy is not the one referred to in that paper, and he professes to be, simply because he stole papers and knows their contents."

"The Dickie Reddington referred to there is Red Tom's wife, and I have sent to her, to her home in Kansas, all her share of profits from her half-interest in the store."

"I tell you, gentlemen of the jury, that that youth killed Red Tom, robbed the store, got hold of these papers, and knowing just how matters stood, from having them in his possession, he came back here to play innocent of his crime and rob me of half of that store."

"Such is the case, gentlemen of the jury, and I leave it to your good sense to decide if he is not guilty."

It was evident that the words of Bunco set the tide once more against Deer-Eye Dick, and seeing it Buck Bradford made a most impassioned appeal for his young client.

He asked the jury to look into his face and see if they could trace there one sign of guilt, and to beware how they decided against him.

But the jury wished to curry favor with Bunco, the all-powerful man of Saw Dust City, and they decided very quickly as to their verdict.

"What do you say, gentlemen?" asked Bunco.

"Guilty."

"Of the murder of Red Tom?"

"Yes, judge."

"Of robbing the store?"

"Yes."

"Of stealing these papers?"

"Yes."

"Of flying to save his life, and returning to defraud me?"

"Yes."

"Then, gentlemen, the prisoner having been proven guilty upon all these charges, and such being your verdict, I do pass sentence upon him, and it is that he shall be hanged by the neck to-morrow afternoon at sunset, on the tree in front of this hotel, and known as the Vigilantes' Gallows, and whereon many a better man has swung before him, and for a far less crime than he has been guilty of."

"Gentlemen of the jury, is my sentence approved?"

The jury nodded as one man, and the trial was ended, Deer-Eye Dick being at once bound and placed under guard in one of the hotel rooms, to await his doom on the morrow, while Buck Bradford, Hank Holden, Ned Talbot, the Overland driver and several others walked off to see if something could not be done to save the unfortunate youth from such an ignominious and untimely end.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PUT TO FLIGHT.

DEER-EYE DICK was a little stunned by the result of his trial.

He knew that Buck Bradford had done all for him that man could do, and he wished to thank him for it, but he was at once forced off by Bunco, who wished to get him safely away in a room of the hotel where no one could see him, excepting the guard which he placed over him.

The youth had thought that when he showed the papers he held, and told his story, the miners would believe him and not Bunco.

But the landlord had a strong pull in his favor in just having been elected judge, for there were few who would go against his authority, lawless as he was, after having put him in the position which they had.

Deer-Eye Dick saw that Buck Bradford, Hank Holden, the driver, Ned Talbot and others believed his story, but they were so few against the majority that sided with Bunco, that he could not hope for any act in his favor.

"If I only knew where to find Buffalo Bill now, he would help me, I know," he muttered to himself, after he had been placed in his prison room—for Saw Dust City did not have what it most needed, a jail—with a rough-looking guard at his door outside.

"And Doctor Powell is with him, and the parson and Sol, all good friends to me and who would not let them hang me."

"My life is not a happy one, for I am an outcast from home and friends; but then I do not wish to die like a dog, for maybe some day all will come well."

"Still I can have no hope now, and suppose I must die."

So mused the poor fellow in his bonds in the

hotel, while outside Buck Bradford was doing all he could to influence the miners in his favor, and Hank Holden and Ned Talbot were aiding him.

Never in its history had Saw Dust City had such a night of excitement, for the calling together of its citizens to elect a court, the appearance of Bowie Ben's ghost in their midst, the going of the Unknown to seek him, the arrival of Deer-Eye Dick on the stage, and the trial that followed, had wrought the people to the highest pitch of excitement, and it was not to be wondered at that several men were killed and others wounded in the quarrels that necessarily followed.

Starting homeward with a party who lived their way, Buck Bradford and Hank Holden were urging the claims of the prisoner strongly, when one of the number, a burly ruffian known as Scar Face, on account of his face being seamed with scars, said:

"Waal, it's my opinion ther jedge are right, and don't you forgit it."

"How do you make that out, Scar Face?" asked Buck Bradford.

"I makes out that he owns ther store, and ther boy kilt Red Tom and stole the papers and ther money, and he should hang for it, and he will, for ther jedge has said so and I backs up ther law."

"I was the one who got Bunco elected, for I flatter myself if I had run, when asked, I would have been elected; but I put Bunco forward, and as long as I deem him acting right I shall support him."

"But this is a case where it is a prisoner against the judge, and Bunco being interested should not have sat on the case, but asked some one else to do so, where no partiality would be shown."

"You is mad with ther jedge 'cause you lost yer case," growled Scar Face.

"It is the boy's life that will be lost, yes, sacrificed, and I will do all I can to prevent it, while, if Judge Bunco does not act square, why there is a judge more powerful than he is that may force him to do so."

"Who's that?"

"Judge Lynch," came the calm response.

"Does yer threaten ther jedge with lynch law, Bradford?" asked Scar Face.

"I threaten nothing, only, as we have decided to have this town run by law, I shall see that justice is done to the full extent I can, for there are many here who should suffer, while that poor boy should be let go."

"That's so," chimed in Hank Holden.

"Maybe you mean me?" growled Scar Face, and he came to a halt just at the corner of the street leading up to the burying-ground.

"If you wish an answer to your question, Scar Face, you force me to say that I think Saw Dust City would be the gainer by your emigrating to the cemetery up yonder."

There was no mistaking the meaning of the words, and most of the party, some score in number, laughed, while Hank Holden said:

"You got your answer barefooted that time, Scar Face, now didn't yer?"

The desperado was taken aback for a moment.

He was ruler at the camp where he dwelt, and few opposed his slightest wish.

He "had his graveyard," so to speak, and his looks revealed very plainly that he had seen desperate doings in his time.

He carried his revolvers for use, he often said, and not for show, and it had been a mooted question which was the worst character—Iron Grip, Devil Dan, Bowie Ben, Room Key Johnny, The Triplets or Scar Face.

As all of the former had "turned up their toes," Scar Face considered himself "the boss o' Saw Dust City," as he called it, along with a pard equally as wicked who answered to the appellation of Mad Eye, on account of the ferocity of expression in the one eye he had left, his other having been shot out.

Twice had Scar Face had trouble with Bowie Ben, to the latter's sorrow, for he had been each time worsted, and so much had his deviltry, cunning and deadly aim been respected by the others that he had not been troubled to any great extent by them.

With his pard Mad Eye, Scar Face had no fear, but alone he seemed to feel like a man who was unarmed where others wore weapons.

On this occasion Mad Eye was not along, and so Scar Face was not enjoying the full bent of his wicked humor.

Had his pard been present, a shot would have answered Buck Bradford's bold words.

As it was, he said:

"You seem to want ter fight with me, Buck Bradford?"

"No, indeed, I seek no trouble; but you asked a question and I answered it."

"Maybe you'd like to put me up in the graveyard yerself?" was the sneering remark.

But hot came the answer:

"If you gave me just cause, Scar Face, I'd not hesitate an instant to be the cause of your going there."

"Waal, young feller, I hain't prepared fer a row ter-night; but you kin jist l'arn right now that arter ther insults yer has put upon me afore

my friends here, that it's shoot at sight atween us from this on."

"That is a cat and dog life to lead, Scar Face, so suppose we have this out now, either stepping off ten paces here, or going up to the cemetery?"

"Does yer think I'm a fool ter go up thar, arter seein' Bowie Ben's ghost to-night?"

"No, I think you are a coward, and you should not be so afraid of what you will soon be yourself."

"Ter-morrow, and ever arter, young feller, it is shoot atween us, fer I hain't fixed ter-night."

"You mean your pard Mad Eye is not here?" said Hank Holden, and the crowd laughed.

"Yer may think that's funny, but I spots them as laughs at me," growled Scar Face, and the weaker kneed present regretted their hilarity.

"No, Scar Face, I do not care to live in such enmity with my fellow-man."

"I have tried to do right since I came here, I have forced a quarrel upon no one, and I am not going about now looking for some one to shoot at sight."

"Those present are as much your comrades as mine, except my pard Holden here, and they will see fair play."

"It is by such aid as yours that Bunco will try to hang that boy, while the better men will wish to save him."

"Come, let one of our party step off ten paces, and we can end this matter right here."

"I says I hain't fixed to-night."

"You are armed, and you are always murderously inclined, so what more do you wish?"

Scar Face glanced around the crowd, and he saw, to hold his own, he must fight.

He did not like the calm courage of the young miner, for it awed him, so different was it from his bullying desperadoism.

But he growled forth:

"Yer kin hev yer way, young feller, as I sees yer is determined ter commit suicide."

"I don't want ter kill yer, fer I thought may be yer'd repent yer sins and turn preacher some day, but I suppose I hes ter as yer wants it so."

Buck Bradford laughed, and asked one to step off the distance and arrange the preliminaries for the duel.

"You'll distarb ther folks in the'r sleep," said Scar Face, with an effort at wit.

"Well, they'll not blame you, Scar Face."

"Why won't they?"

"People censure the living and not the dead, so they'll blame me," was the significant reply.

Scar Face was about to make some reply, when suddenly a voice called out:

"Who is that?"

All eyes beheld, coming through the darkness, from toward the Sinner's Hope Burying-ground, a tall form, walking at a quick, though noiseless step.

As he drew near enough to be distinctly seen Scar Face uttered a startled oath and dashed away toward the river, while some one called out:

"It's Bowie Ben's ghost."

Then all but two ran off, while the "ghost" started at a full run directly after Scar Face, who had headed toward the river.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A MYSTERIOUS DEATH.

THE two men of the party who had not taken flight, at the appearance of the ghost of Bowie Ben, were Buck Bradford and Hank Holden.

They had caught sight of the advancing form as the others had, and wondered at its coming down the hill from the cemetery, at that time of night, for it was but a couple of hours to dawn, as there was no cabin beyond where they had halted, on the road leading up to Sinner's Hope Cemetery.

After the apparition, said to be Bowie Ben's ghost, in the early part of the night, at the Sinner's Rest Hotel, they did not believe any one would go near the graveyard, unless the Unknown had done so, as had been reported by those who had watched him ride in that direction.

The Unknown, however, had gone on horseback, and the form approaching was on foot.

Both of the friends had a good look at the apparition, when it strode into the bar of the hotel, and quaffed a drink, and they had pronounced it to be certainly Bowie Ben, if alive, and his ghost if dead.

If they had known of the visits of the Unknown, the Indian and the Chinese, to the cemetery, and what they saw and did, perhaps even the two brave young miners would have beaten a hasty retreat with the others, to all of whom Scar Face had set the example by his bounding away with a howl of oaths.

But each of the two glanced at the other, and seeing an inclination to remain, neither moved.

So they saw the apparition come on, in that same weird way which he had shown at the hotel, looking straight ahead and seeming to see nothing.

It certainly was the same being, apparition or ghost they had seen a few hours before.

It paused within a few feet of them, and then, just as Buck Bradford was about to speak to it,

seemed to glide away, rather than run after Scar Face, who was making remarkably good time, with a start of some sixty or seventy feet.

"What do you make of it, Buck?" asked Holden.

"Don't know; but it looks mighty ghostly, and if it is not Bowie Ben, then it is his ghost."

"So I think; but we'll go up to the cemetery in the morning and see if Bowie Ben is still in his grave."

"Yes, we'll do that; but now suppose we follow on after Scar Face and the ghost, for they have gone to the pine grove yonder, and the only way they can get out is to swim the river."

"Do ghosts swim, Buck?"

"I don't know; never heard of such a case; but we'll soon know," and the two friends started at a quick trot for the clump of pine woods.

They grew upon a point of land, around which the river curved, and were a resort of the miners who used it as a park.

The grove was some two acres in size, and the trees were large and scattering, so that it made a pleasant resort.

"Wait here, Hank, while I go in, so you can see if any one comes out," said Buck, leaving his friend upon the narrow neck of the little peninsula, which was not more than fifty feet across.

Then Buck Bradford went into the grove, and for half an hour Hank awaited his return.

Then he heard a call, and he hastened into the timber.

"Where are you, Buck?"

"Here."

Toward him Hank went and soon came upon him standing by the side of a huge boulder.

"What have you there, Buck?" he asked, as he saw something at his feet.

"Scar Face."

"What! did you have it out with knives, for I heard no shot?"

"No, we had no fight, for I found him dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes, stone dead."

"You are sure?"

"Neither his pulse or his heart beat or throb."

"This is strange, Buck."

"Very."

"And the ghost?"

"It glided away as I drew near."

"Buck, I wish we understood all this."

"I wish so, too."

"What are we to do?"

"Put the body in the little cabin yonder, and go home until morning."

There was a small cabin on the point, where a miner once had lived, but having been killed it was afterward deserted and used only as a place to sell liquors, when the miners took a day "off" and picnicked in the woods.

To this the body of Scar Face was borne, and both of the young miners made a careful examination to see if he really was dead.

Deciding upon this they left him there, closed the door and went to their cabin.

The sun was up when they arose, and after breakfast they mounted their horses and rode up to the cabin of the Unknown.

That personage was seated in front of his cabin, under the roof that served as a piazza, the flooring being the solid rock.

He had finished his breakfast and was smoking a cigar and enjoying the grand view spread out before him.

He saw the young men coming and greeted them in his courteous way, while he said:

"Be seated, gentlemen, and say how I can serve you, for as I have invited no one to visit me, your call surely means that you need my aid."

The hot blood rushed into the faces of the two men, but checking his anger, Buck Bradford said:

"I did call to ask you to serve us, but it is in a different way than you doubtless think, and the sooner you dismiss from your mind any idea that we wish aid of you, other than is right, it will be the better for us all."

"I am in the dark as to your motives, sir, I admit, in your coming here," was the smiling, yet frigid reply.

"In a word I will explain."

"Last night, after you left the hotel, the stage arrived and brought one passenger, a youth who was once here as clerk in the Bonanza Palace store."

"Red Tom, the storekeeper, was killed the night the youth left, and all supposed the boy had murdered him, and he was seized last night, and after a border trial sentenced to be hanged at sunset this evening."

"We elected last night Bunco as a judge, and twelve jurymen, to try and help the morals of these camps, and the trial was before them, and Bunco sentenced him."

"What then?"

"The youth, whose name is Deer-Eye Dick, says that a Chinese, who left with him that night, killed Red Tom."

"He states that Red Tom meant to attack him, when the Chinese sprung forward and killed him."

"Then they fled together, along with another Chinese, the brother of the one who killed Red Tom."

"The boy returned last night, as I said, to get his property, for he has papers to prove that half the store was his, and not Red Tom's, and I feel that he tells the truth."

"Still, if the judge has sentenced him nothing can be done," said the Unknown, in a tired kind of way.

"Oh, yes, much can be done, for the case was tried by Bunco, who was an interested party, and I feel that a change should be made, a new trial allowed, and that another should sit in judgment upon the boy."

"Why do you not so have it, then?"

"Because those who support me are greatly in the minority."

"Majorities do not always win."

"True, sir, and we came to you to say we would like to demand a new trial, and temporarily appoint you as judge in the case."

"Ah! it is an honor I appreciate, I assure you, and I am willing to act in the matter."

"Thank you, sir, and we will bring up the matter this afternoon, and wish you could be at the hotel, for your presence would go far toward giving us success."

"I will be there, gentlemen, as you request."

"And now may I ask if you made any discovery regarding the ghost last night?"

In spite of his nerve the Unknown started, and his brow clouded, as though angry at himself for showing the slightest emotion.

But he answered, calmly:

"I discovered that what I saw was beyond finding out."

"It is a remarkable circumstance, sir, for we also are at a loss to solve the mystery, having again seen the apparition last night."

"Indeed! pray tell me what happened?" and the stranger showed considerable interest, as Buck Bradford told the story of what had occurred, up to their finding the dead body of Scar Face in the grove of pines.

"It is yonder grove?" he said, pointing to the point nearly a mile away on the other shore of the river.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you not afraid that you will be accused of murdering Scar Face, as there were no witnesses?"

Buck started at this, for it had not crossed his mind before that he might be accused.

"I think no one will dare accuse me of murder," he said.

"I hope not; but no one knows what may happen here!" and the bow of the Unknown meant that the interview had ended.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A USELESS APPEAL.

AFTER leaving the cabin of the Unknown, the two young miners rode down into the camps, that comprised Saw Dust City.

They found the camps astir after the exciting scenes of the night before, and nearly half of the population had gone up to the Sinner's Hope burying-ground to see if the grave of Bowie Ben had been disturbed.

They found the grave as though it had not been touched, but upon it were a number of Indian arrows, painted blood-red, and some bullets flattened out, as though they had struck against an impenetrable substance and fallen there.

These were brought away and carried to the Sinner's Rest Hotel, where they were placed upon exhibition.

Knowing of the execution that was to take place late in the afternoon, the miners had knocked off from work and begun to congregate, as Buck Bradford said:

"This is just what Bunco postponed the hanging for, that he might draw business there, and after all he may be at the bottom of this Bowie Ben ghost, to get the miners to idle away their time talking it over, the hotel being of course the assembling point."

"Well, we will go first up to the cemetery and dig for Bowie Ben's remains, for if his body is there, that settles it," Hank Holden remarked.

"Yes, but about Scar Face?"

"They do not seem to have found him yet, so we can wait until our return," and so they went on up to the burying-ground.

There were quite a number of miners there, not one of whom would have dared go there at night, and they were examining the grave carefully.

As Buck and Hank rode up they saw one or two who had been of the party the night before, and which had dispersed with such ludicrous alacrity at sight of the "ghost" on its silent rounds.

"Ho, Buck, whar did yer go last night?" called out one.

"I stayed where I was, Nick, but I saw you go as if you'd been sent for."

"I had biz elsewhar jist then; but whar did ther ghost go?"

"It set off in chase of Scar Face."

"My! I thought a cyclone had struck Scar Face and carried him off, he shot off so when he see Bowie Ben."

"He wasn't the only one that 'dusted,' Nick."

"Not much; but did you and Hank stand thar?"

"Yes."

"You've got narve in yer."

"The ghost did not harm us."

"It were Bowie Ben, sure as sin."

"That's what we wish to find out."

"How?"

"Dig him up."

"Would you do it?"

"Yes."

"Better not fool with folks arter they is planted."

"Let him alone until judgment day."

"Don't do it, Buck."

"It's bad luck."

"Yer'll see sorrow, Buck."

"Misfortin' will come to yer, pard."

Such were the warnings given the young miner; but hitching their horses the two friends got the picks, spade and shovel belonging to the graveyard and set to work.

They heard of the arrows that had been picked up there, and the flattened bullets; but it did not deter them, and they worked diligently throwing out the earth.

Some of the more superstitious miners walked hastily away, while others remained, but none would lend a hand, and so Hank and Buck toiled together and soon reached the box which by courtesy was called a coffin.

They opened it and saw that Bowie Ben's body lay just as it had been placed in the grave.

"His clothes have not been taken off, as I expected," said Buck in a low tone.

"No, and I don't understand the ghost business yet," returned Hank.

"Nor I; but 'search and ye shall find,' is good advice," and the coffin was fastened up again and the grave refilled with care as before.

Then mounting their horses the two friends rode back toward the camps, the others following them.

As they drew near the pine grove, they started off at a gallop and rode to the little cabin.

"It is empty," cried Buck as he threw open the door.

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"What does it mean, Buck?"

"Either that we were mistaken in believing him to be dead, or some one has found him and carried him off."

"Where?"

"To his cabin, I guess."

"Let us see."

So they rode down to the cabin of Scar Face, where he lived with Mad Eye.

The door was closed, and upon it was a placard which was rudely written and read:

"Gone on ther trail of ther murderer of my pard, Scar Face. MAD EYE."

"He has found his body," said Hank quietly.

"Yes."

"We must look out for him."

"Sure."

"Where now?"

"To the Sinner's Rest."

"You'll likely find Mad Eye there."

"So much the better, for he wishes to settle accounts. I wish it done at once."

"Let us go by home and get dinner first."

"Agreed."

And the two miners went to their cabin and cooked their dinner, after which they mounted their horses and rode toward the Sinner's Rest Hotel.

It was growing late in the afternoon, and when they drew near they saw that a vast crowd had gathered there.

The camps were deserted and their occupants seemed to be all at the hotel of Landlord Bunco.

Before coming from their cabin the two young miners had looked carefully to their arms, and they rode up to the cabin with a full feeling of the gravity of the situation.

Many greeted them with a shout, for it was now known to all of the quarrel between Scar Face and Buck Bradford the night before, the coming of the ghost, the flight of all excepting the two friends, and that they had boldly dug up the body of Bowie Ben a few hours before.

The liquids of Rum Charlie had been in demand, and two-thirds of the crowd were in a fair humor for anything that should turn up.

As they dismounted from their horses the two friends were met by Bunco, who was in a cheerful humor and said:

"Buck, you defended your client well last night, but facts were against you."

"Come and take something."

"No, thank you, Bunco; but there is a report I wish to make to you," Buck replied.

"Well?"

"You have doubtless heard that some score of us last night on our way home saw the ghost of Bowie Ben again?"

"Yes, I heard of it, and that you and Scar Face were going to fight a duel when the ghost put you all to flight."

"No; neither Hank nor myself ran off, but the others did, and we followed the ghost, who went in chase of Scar Face."

"No!"

"Scar Face ran into the Park of Pines, and the ghost followed, and thither I went, while Hank kept watch on the neck of land."

"I did not find the ghost, but I found Scar Face dead at the foot of the Castle Rocks."

"I called Hank and we carried him to the cabin."

"He was dead, you say?"

"Yes."

"Shot?"

"No, or we should have heard the shot, while there was no wound about him that we could discover in the darkness."

"What did you do then?"

"We left him in the cabin, and when we went to get him to-day he was gone."

"Yes; he's here."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"Alive?"

"No."

"Who brought him?"

"His pard."

"Mad Eye?"

"Yes, and was a mad man, I can tell you, and threatens to kill the one who killed his pard."

"Well, he has that to find out."

"Yes, and he will."

"What killed Scar Face?"

"I don't know, for I examined the body and there is not a wound of any kind upon it."

"I would not be surprised if he died of fright," said Hank Holden.

"Better not let Mad Eye hear you say so."

"Bunco, neither Buck or myself fear to say out just what we think," returned Holden, sharply.

"Well, pards, it's strange about Scar Face dying as he did, and we must solve the mystery, now we have a court in Saw Dust; but the first thing to be done now is to hang that b. y."

"Bunco!"

"Well, Pard Buck?"

"Can you not postpone the hanging of that poor boy for a week or so?"

"Not an hour."

"This is your determination?"

"Yes."

"Well, I hope we can arrange to have him given a new trial."

"I will never consent to it," said Bunco, with anger.

"It may be decided to give him a new trial, Bunco, even without your consent, for I say frankly, in hanging that boy you are doing the very thing you pretend to prevent—commit crime."

"Look here, Buck Bradford, I am judge here, and my word is law, and I will allow no interference with my decision, and I say that the boy shall hang, and within the hour, too."

"Can I see him?"

"No."

"You are deaf to every appeal?"

"Yes, appeals to me are useless, for I'll have my way."

"And I'll have mine, mark my words," was the bold response of Buck Bradford, as he turned away from the angry landlord.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BUCK BRADFORD GAINS HIS POINT.

AS though not to delay the execution of Deer-Eye Dick, for fear something might be done to prevent it, Bunco at once set to work to make all arrangements, intending to be the executioner as well as judge.

But Buck Bradford had made no idle threat when he had said that he would have his way, too, and he and Hank Holden had at once gone among the miners urging that the poor boy had not had fair play, as he had been tried before a judge who was his accuser.

"Give him another chance, boys, for it is as easy to hang him then as now, if the second trial goes against him," had urged both of the young miners, and their words were listened to by many, and at last a growing desire to give the youth fair play gained ground.

"But who'll be judge in ther place o' Bunco?" asked one.

"That mysterious stranger would be a good man, for he knows nothing about the parties, or, rather, does not care."

"You mean the one they call the Unknown?"

"Yes."

"Now I would like ter see him on ther jedge's bench for a fact, an' I says yes."

"Of course, Bunco, being interested, should not try the case, and he will yield for this trial only," urged Buck Bradford.

These views were diligently spread through the crowd, and feeling that they had gained their point, the friends began to look anxiously for the Unknown.

Soon he was seen coming, and he was mounted upon his white horse, while behind him a few lengths rode the Indian chief.

Just then out of the hotel came Bunco, and by his side walked Deer-Eye Dick.

The youth was pale, but perfectly calm, and seemed not to dread his fate in the least.

Behind him followed the jury, one of whom bore the rope to be used.

Over the crowd, as a deathlike silence fell, Deer-Eye Dick glanced without the quiver of a muscle, and seeing Buck Bradford, smiled and bowed, the miner raising his hat in return.

"Narve ter sell, thet youngster's got," said a voice, and instantly comments upon his pluck ran through the crowd.

As they descended the steps Buck Bradford suddenly sprung upon the stage-block before the door and called out:

"Fellow miners! your attention, please!"

All eyes were upon him, while Bunco said, savagely:

"Don't make a disturbance here, Buck Bradford, or you'll get the worst of it."

"Fellow miners, I beg of you to hear me!"

"Hear him!"

"Talk! Talk!"

"Say your leetle say!"

"Silence all, and let Buck chin!"

Raising his hand for silence it followed immediately, and Buck Bradford said:

"Men, you know I was the one who said that there should be law and justice here, and I proposed Landlord Bunco for judge."

"Now I say that we who elected him should be heard, and I say it boldly that, as Bunco is interested in this case, as he was that youth's accuser, as he owns half the Bonanza Palace store, he should not have been the judge in this case."

"It was not therefore a fair trial, and in the name of that poor boy, who so nobly faces death, an ignominious death that is but a murder, I beg of you as men to demand a new trial, when Bunco shall step aside and another judge try this case in his stead."

"What say you, gentlemen?"

A cheer, ending in a prolonged yell showed that the crowd thought as did the young miner; but Bunco immediately sprung back upon the steps and called for attention.

"You elected me judge, pards, and this boy was fairly tried by me, and I say he shall hang."

Many wished to have it so, fearing that a new trial might disappoint them in their thirst for a death-scene on the gallows, and it was evident that two parties would at once be formed, for and against.

"Men, I have the name of one to propose who will act as judge in this trial," cried Buck Bradford.

"No man shall usurp my authority and step into my shoes," yelled Bunco, and his words were greeted with a yell that showed he held the bad element of the crowd, and who outnumbered the better men.

"I propose, and ask that gentleman yonder, he whom we only know as the Unknown, to act as judge in a second trial of Deer-Eye Dick," and Buck Bradford pointed toward the Unknown, who had ridden near and still sat on his horse.

A cheer followed, and then a dead silence.

The Unknown did not change countenance, as he rode forward, raised his sombrero, and smiling said:

"I thank you, sir, for the honor done me, and as I feel that the youth should not be hanged without a full and just trial, I accept the position of judge for this occasion."

At once his words carried the crowd with him, and Bunco was black in the face with rage.

"Eat your words, Bunco," said Hank Holden, as he pressed near him, referring to the boast that no man should usurp his place as judge.

And, catching the dark eye of the Unknown, Bunco did "eat his words," so to speak.

That was a man he did not wish trouble with, for he had future designs upon him, in a monetary way, outside of his real dread of him as a most deadly and dangerous personage.

So he bowed, swallowed his fury, and said:

"Where my seat is to be occupied by my distinguished friend, I yield gracefully."

Instantly Buck Bradford pressed to the side of the young prisoner, and said:

"I will do all in my power to save you, my young friend, for somehow I feel the deepest interest in you."

"I thank you, sir; but if you fail to win my case, let me say to you that I do not fear to die, and in fact do not think they will hang me."

"You do not know them, for they are worse than ravenous wolves," was the eager response.

"Still I feel I shall not die," was the firm reply.

Then a table and chairs were brought out upon the piazza, for the crowd could not get into the hotel, and the Unknown took his seat as judge, Bunco constituting himself special constable to see that the prisoner did not escape.

The jury took their places, and Buck Bradford, as Deer-Eye Dick's attorney, opened the case.

He at once became very personal and bitter against Bunco, scoring him unmercifully as a judge who sat upon a case against one whom he accused of murder and robbery, and the fickle crowd laughed, cheered or growled according as his words struck their fancies.

He even hinted at the obsequious manner in which Bunco had eaten his words, when he saw who it was that was to be the judge.

Bunco grew white, red and black by turns, as he heard himself so severely handled, and then slipped away through the hotel door at his back, leaving the jury to act as guard to the prisoner in his absence.

He was gone but a few moments, and then returned accompanied by Mad Eye, the pard of the dead Scar Face.

Almost a brute in face, as far as ferocity went, looked Mad Eye, while a cunning leer rested upon his lower features, and the overhanging brow and fierce black eye, gave him an expression that was almost appalling.

His left eye had been shot out, and the scar was a bad one, while his bearded face and long, straggling hair made him resemble a madman.

He was a man of powerful physique, had a heavy neck, wide, solid shoulders, and his arms were massive and long, his hands immense.

He wore three revolvers and a knife in his belt, and seemed ready for any deadly work that might turn up.

At a glance Bradford saw why Bunco had brought him—to disconcert him for one thing, and to threaten him for another, with telling Mad Eye that he had killed his pard.

But Buck Bradford did not change color, as he continued in his address, which was really eloquent, as well as sarcastic and a tirade against Bunco.

"Bunco says that this boy killed Red Tom," he went on.

"The youth says that he did not, and gives a most plausible account of the death of that desperado."

"I leave it to you all, gentlemen, who gaze into the faces of the landlord and Deer-Eye Dick, who is the most worthy of belief."

"Bunco wants to hang the boy so he can have all the store for himself, and thus you see his motive for getting rid of Deer-Eye Dick."

"Not liking my exposing his motives," continued Buck Bradford, "Bunco slunk off and returned with that individual whom you see by his side, hoping that I might be terrified when I beheld that he had something like a mad hyena to back him up."

"But, gentlemen, my desire is to save that boy from the gallows, independent of Bunco and his pard of the solitary eye."

A perfect hush fell upon all at this, for they saw through Bunco's act, too, and they felt sure that Mad Eye would have revenge for the words of the young miner. But they admired his pluck, and were pleased to have him lash anybody that the community in general feared as they did Bunco and Mad Eye.

After reading the papers that Deer-Eye had had, and which he had kept, Buck Bradford ended in an appeal to the Unknown and the jury for mercy for his youthful client.

Then all listened in breathless silence for the words that must fall from the lips of Bunco in accusation against the prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ACCUSED.

BUNCO, when he arose to resume his charges against Deer-Eye Dick, avoided all defense of himself as to his being interested in having the youth hanged, to get his money, but told of the death of Red Tom, and that the prisoner alone could have committed the deed.

He told how the store had been robbed, and the boy had thus found the papers, giving one Dickie Deering a half-interest in the store, and returning, had tried to palm himself off as that person.

He had also prevailed upon two poor Chinese servants to fly with him, that he might lay the charge of murder upon them, if accused.

"The boy committed the murder and no one else," he continued, "and Buck Bradford is defending him simply to save his own neck for a crime of which he may be accused."

"Now, Sir Judge, you have heard the prisoner's statement of the case, through his counsel, and you have listened to mine, so it is for you to say which is the true story, and whether he be guilty or not, for, as I understand it, the jury having decided with me in the trial last night, you are trying the case alone."

When Bunco's harangue ended, it was evident that Buck Bradford had won, in the minds of three-fourths of the crowd.

The jury seemed also to be convinced by the argument of the young miner, against their judgment of the case the night before.

Bunco, it could be seen, was looking to the hanging of Deer-Eye Dick to benefit Bunco, and that wild crowd soon discovered that fact.

During the words of both, the Unknown had sat in silence, and his face had betrayed no emotion, given no sign as to what he thought.

That smile, never absent, rested upon his remarkable face, and it seemed not to change in mercy for the prisoner, or determination to see him hanged.

After the ending of the speeches, he turned to Deer-Eye Dick, and said:

"Prisoner, rise and tell your story!"

This the youth did in a voice that reached every ear.

"Gentlemen of the jury, how would you decide in this case?" asked the Unknown, calmly.

"Not guilty!" responded the foreman, who had the rope about his own neck, as the better way to carry it.

A cheer broke from the crowd at this.

The Unknown glanced quietly over the crowd, then at the jury, then upon Buck Bradford, and at last let his gaze rest fully upon Deer-Eye Dick, who met his look without a quiver.

As if enjoying the suspense felt by all, the Unknown waited for full two minutes, amid a silence that was fearful, though every face showed more anxiety than did that of the young prisoner.

At last the Unknown spoke, and his deep voice was heard by all.

"Mr. Bradford, you made a most able appeal for the prisoner, while you, Landlord Bunco, were weak in presenting your case."

"You, gentlemen of the jury, were influenced by the eloquence of the prisoner's counsel, while I am governed wholly by my own personal views of the case."

"For this trial I have been appointed, as I understand it, as judge with full powers, and as such I pronounce my decision in regard to the innocence or guilt of the prisoner."

Here he paused, and all felt the deep suspense of the moment, though Deer-Eye Dick looked him squarely in the eye without flinching.

Angered by the deliberate, cruel manner of the Unknown, Buck Bradford broke the intense silence with:

"Be a man, and don't torture, as you are doing, one who looks to you for mercy!"

The eyes of the Unknown fairly blazed as he turned them quickly upon the speaker, who met his gaze defiantly, while a murmur ran through the crowd, with the name:

"Buckskin Mose."

Unperceived, in the excitement of the moment, the Jew scout had come into the camp, and made his way through the crowd to a position near Hank Holden.

Buckskin Mose met the gaze unflinchingly, and said:

"Don't you vas thinks you vas scare me, because I don't be afraid von leetle bits."

"But you tells vat you thinks about t'e poy, if you vas shudge, and if you don't vas talk git and I will be t'e shudge."

The words of the Jew raised a laugh, and many a remark passed around as to the courage he showed in bearding the mysterious stranger.

But the Unknown made no reply to Buckskin Mose, though his look expressed volumes, which might be interpreted into the short expression, bordering on slang:

"I'll see you later."

Turning coolly to Deer-Eye Dick, he said:

"Prisoner, it being my right to decide your case, I now pronounce you to be *guilty of all charges made against you.*"

Had a bombshell been fired from the mountain down into that crowd, it would not have created more intense surprise, than did the words of the judge.

Men held their breath, others sighed, some groaned, a few cheered, and others seemed struck dumb.

"Great God!" broke from the lips of Buck Bradford.

"I feared it, for he looks like one to condemn from sheer cruelty of nature," Hank Holden said savagely.

"He was more savage as a wolf, and I don't vas forget it," and Buckskin Mose spoke in a voice that seemed to be meant for the ear of the Unknown.

But if he heard it, he did not show it by any sign as he sat in silence awaiting for the crowd to calm down.

And the prisoner?

He did not move at the words of the stranger, and over his face stole a strange smile.

At length Bunco, whose face was now radiant, rapped for order, and when silence followed, he asked:

"And your sentence, sir?"

"My sentence is that the prisoner be hanged by the neck until he is dead, and this shall be done before the sun sets behind yonder mountain."

Then turning to Deer-Eye Dick he continued: "Prisoner, you have just one half-hour to live," and he glanced at his massive gold watch, bowed and disappeared in the hotel door.

A few moments after he went out through the Bonanza Palace store, mounted his horse, held for him by the Indian, and rode away.

"Men, I appeal to you, don't let this murder be done under the false vail of justice!"

"I appeal to your hearts, your love of right and wrong, for that prisoner is but a mere boy, one who has hardly more than passed his eighteenth year."

"Do not let this crime be committed!" and the clear voice of Buck Bradford rung above the crowd.

But no one responded, and Deer-Eye Dick called to him with:

"Mr. Bradford, do not say more, for your friendship will only bring trouble upon you."

"I but do my duty in pleading for you, and I feel that there are some here who will support me in my appeal."

"Ay, Buck, I am here to sink or swim with you," cried Hank Holden.

"I was on deck, too, mine fri'nt, to say t'e poy must not die."

"If you want to hang somebodys, hang mine fri'nt Bunco, for he was lif long enough, and if he don't want to die, hang dat fellers mit von eyes, for he was too ugly to lif."

Had the Jew scout spoken of any other two men, the crowd would have laughed; but neither Bunco nor Mad Eye just then were to be laughed at, and only a murmur went the rounds, and all eyes turned upon Buckskin Mose.

"Men, I have backers, you see, and bold ones, too, so others come to the side of right, and range yourselves with us against having that youth hanged."

The words of Buck Bradford had good effect, for a number of good men and true began to move toward the steps, when, seeing the movement, Bunco called out:

"Hold all! not only shall this youth hang, but one other, for I am now judge once more, and I arrest Buck Bradford in the name of justice."

"And of what am I accused?" firmly demanded the young miner, as he wheeled toward Bunco.

He saw that the words of the landlord had created a sensation, and he knew that the Unknown having ridden off, Bunco would attempt to regain his power again.

Nor was he disappointed, for in saying what he had, Bunco had swayed the crowd over to his side once more, and half of those who a moment before stepped forward to aid Buck Bradford, now remained quiet.

"Judge or no judge! I now ask you of what you dare to accuse me?" cried Buck Bradford, and his voice rung like a trumpet.

"I am not your accuser, Buck Bradford, I simply arrest you," was the answer.

"Why do you arrest me and not bring your charge against me?"

"I arrest you as an officer of the law, and I shall bring no charge, as if I do, some one else will try the case, you urging that I am prejudiced against you."

"I v s try t'e case mineself," shouted Buckskin Mose.

"Who then is my accuser?" asked Buck Bradford, in an indignant tone.

"I be!" It was Mad Eye that spoke, and his voice was hoarse with passion.

He had stepped forward so that every eye was upon him, and at his words Bunco, the jury and himself covered Buck Bradford with their revolvers.

The young miner saw that he was helpless, and Hank Holden, in his fury, would have drawn a weapon had not Buckskin Mose said quickly:

"Don't do it! wait mine fri'nt and see vat was t'e matters mit t'e vild beoples."

"And of what am I accused?" asked Buck Bradford, in a voice wholly unnerved.

"Of murder."

"Whom have I killed?"

"My pard."

It was Mad Eye who answered now.

"The desperado known as Scar Face, and your equal in villainy?" asked Bradford.

"Yes."

"I did not kill him."

"You did."

"You lie."

Mad Eye laughed, and it contorted his face into hyena-like ferocity.

"I say yer did, fer yer follered him inter ther Park o' Pines last night and shot him thar."

"You cannot show a bullet-mark upon his body, for he died of fright from being pursued by Bowie Ben's ghost."

"I can show a bullet-mark in the center of his forehead!"

"You cannot," cried Hank Holden.

Mad Eye turned to Bunco, who stood near, and at a motion from the landlord the door was opened and half a dozen servants of the hotel bore out the body of Scar Face, holding it up before the crowd in an upright position.

"There!" shouted Mad Eye pointing to a bullet-wound in his forehead.

"You shot that there yourself, after you brought the body here, for not much over an hour ago Bunco told me he could find no wound upon him."

"You killed him, and you shall hang for it."

"Judge Bunco, I ask you to try this man for the murder of my pard, poor Scar Face!"

"I'll do it, Mad Eye; but let him be bound here to this post, while we proceed to hang this prisoner, who murdered my pard, Red Tom."

"All right, hang ther boy, and ter-night we'll try that gamecock and string him up ter-morrer," yelled Mad Eye.

"Come, prisoner, you must die now," and Bunco turned to Deer-Eye Dick.

But just then the hotel door was thrown open and two men stepped out upon the piazza, both with a revolver in each hand, and one said:

"Hards, you don't hang that boy, for he is my friend!"

"Buffalo Bill! Frank Powell!"

Eye Dick in a voice that all heard, and over that wild crowd fell a silence as deep as the hush of a death-chamber.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JUSTICE IF NOT LAW.

BUFFALO BILL! A name that was known from the northern frontier to the Gulf shores.

A name that many a wild story was told about the possessor of, both in the mining-camp, the hunter's-camp, the border town and the soldier's bivouac.

A name that told of exalted courage, a brave heart, a splendid man, and one who had accomplished wonders, had won deserved fame, had never turned his back upon friend or foe.

And his companion? He who had come with him out upon the piazza of the Sinner's Rest Hotel and faced that angry, desperate crowd? Frank Powell, the Surgeon Scout!

A man whose life had been a romance, and one whose courage had been tried again and again and never known to fail.

Two more superb-looking men in physique, two handsomer men in face, with all the qualities that go to make up magnificent manhood, are seldom met together.

The scout was calm, resolute and threatening; the surgeon was unmoved, but ready for any emergency that might come up.

The guards over Buck Bradford forgot their duty at sight of them, and the young miner at once stood on the defensive.

Then Buckskin Mose, Driver Talbot and Hank Holden edged their way toward the steps, as though to be near Buffalo Bill and Powell in case of trouble, and in the doorway appeared two others, and they were the parson and Sol.

They all made up but eight men, but they were a power even in their small minority.

As for Bunco, he turned deadly pale, for in Buffalo Bill he recognized a stranger who had come there one day long before, pretending to be a member of the Silver Circle League in the Haunted Mountains, of which Carter Creighton had been chief.

The landlord knew that the scout had discovered some ugly secrets there, and he did not know what might be the result.

Not three men in all that crowd knew Buffalo Bill by sight, and yet, ex-chief of scouts in the army on the border, they were well aware of his power, and he was not one to seek trouble with.

Frank Powell they had known, many of them, when he had lived back in the mountains, and they had a certain knowledge that he too was a dangerous man to badger, while they knew that he was a surgeon in the army.

So matters stood when Buffalo Bill and Frank Powell stepped out upon the piazza, and the former boldly stated that Deer-Eye Dick was his friend, and he should not be hanged.

"What has you got ter do with it?" asked Mad Eye in a savage tone.

Buffalo Bill already had his gaze upon Mad Eye, and he answered in his indifferent way:

"You will see, old Bull's-Eye, very soon, and I advise you not to chip in, if you wish to keep that other eye of yours."

Mad Eye's hand was upon his revolver, but he saw that Frank Powell had him covered, and so did not attempt the suicidal act of drawing his weapon, but said:

"I will see, and I intends ter, fer you can't bully this town if you is Buffalo Bill."

"Every dog has his day, Bull's-Eye, and yours will come soon; but for the present I wish to know what the trouble is with this youth."

"I'll tell you, sir, for I am judge—" began Bunco.

"You'll do no such thing, Judge Shyster, for I wish to know the truth."

"What is it, Deer-Eye Dick?"

Bunco shrunk back, while Hank Holden started a laugh that proved contagious and it went around the crowd at the landlord's discomfiture.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Cody, in a word."

"They wish to hang me for the murder of Red Tom, and swear I am guilty."

"Who swears so?"

"That man, Bunco."

"He'd swear to anything but the truth."

And again Hank started a laugh, as the best way of throwing ridicule upon Bunco to make him lose his grip with the crowd.

"Why, Dick," continued Buffalo Bill, "we tried to find you at the end of your Pony Express run, but found you had served out your year and left, so we came on here, and I feared you would have trouble."

"They arrested me as soon as I arrived, and this man Bunco, who owes me ten thousand dollars, yes, and more, for there is the profit on the store, wished to get rid of me so he might have it all, so he accused me of killing Red Tom."

"That young man, Buck Bradford, pleaded my case, but Bunco was judge and they made me out guilty, although I have the papers to prove who I am and told them I had not killed Red Tom."

"They intended to hang me to-night at sunset, and Buck Bradford got the good miners here to demand another trial and appoint another judge, a stranger here whom we knew only as the Unknown."

"But he too decided against me, and a second time I was sentenced."

"Where is this mysterious Unknown?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"He rode back to his mine after deciding the case against me."

"He's as big a fraud as this judge," said Buffalo Bill, and Mad Eye called out:

"When you knows that man yer won't dare call him a fraud."

"Hullo, old Bull's-Eye, you've broke out again, I see."

"You better keep quiet, or I will gag you," and turning once more to the youth he continued:

"Go on with your story, Dick."

"Well, sir, I've told about all, excepting that Bunco and Mad Eye there were revengeful against Buck Bradford for defending me, and now accuse him of murder."

"It is doubtless a trumped-up charge, but we shall see, after you have been squared," and turning to Bunco, he asked:

"Now, judge, what have you to say about this boy's guilt?"

In a few words Bunco told his story, telling that he had paid to the wife of Red Tom the profits of the store, she being also, as Dickie Deering, the owner of the half.

"Now, Judge Bunco," said Buffalo Bill, "I have a word to say as a witness, and there are two others who will confirm my words."

"The one who killed Red Tom was Hop-Up, a Chinese, who was your servant, and is now at the fort where I am stationed."

"He told me himself that he killed your brutish friend and partner, and that he did so to save the life of this boy."

"I happen also to know that this boy's name is Dick Deering, and in his younger days he was called Dickie."

"I saw his name on the register of the Pony Express Riders, and for a year past he has been a Pony Rider."

"If you have the papers claiming one-half share, from an investment of ten thousand dollars in your store, he gets it, and more, he receives every dollar of profit since Red Tom's death, and mind you, I must see your books to know just what it is."

"Now, judge, you sit right there and write out an acquittal for this youth, of the charges against him."

"Never! I—"

"Don't be a fool, Judge Shyster Bunkum, for I will not trifle an instant with you."

"Write that acquittal or you die!"

Bunco glanced helplessly over the crowd; but he saw no hope there, for the man who held him in his power was feared by the lawless among the party, and the better men were already on the side of right.

"Send for the Unknown, and tell him to come quick," he whispered to Mad Eye, who was glad to get away.

The whisper was heard, and the crowd drew a long breath, for they expected a tragedy sure when the mysterious stranger arrived.

Buffalo Bill smiled at the words, and said:

"I shall be glad to see your friend; but he'll get here to find you a subject for the undertaker, if you do not do as I order you."

Bunco saw that death was certain, and he sat down to the table and wrote as Buffalo Bill dictated:

"I, Bunco, judge by election of the miners of Saw Dust City, do hereby find Deer-Eye Dick—Dickie Deering—not guilty of the murder of Red Tom, or the robbery of the Boranza Palace store, and hereby honorably discharge him from custody."

(Signed) Bunco, Judge."

"Here, Dick, put that in your pocket, and now let me see the papers that give you your claim to half the store," and Buffalo Bill handed over the document just signed.

Buck Bradford at once handed over the papers he had and Buffalo Bill and Frank Powell glanced over them, the latter reading them aloud:

"You swear you are the one herein named?" asked the scout, turning to the youth.

"I solemnly swear it, sir, so help me God!" was the earnest reply.

"Bunco, just how much do you owe this youth on profits of the store since the death of Red Tom?"

"Not a dollar, for I paid it to Red Tom's wife."

"You were a little too previous, judge, and as you hold such a high position you should have known better than to pay money to the wrong person."

"How much was the profit from your store?"

"One thousand dollars a month."

"Indeed! I think that is a remarkably small per cent. on an investment of twenty thousand dollars out here."

"Six per cent. in the East would bring that, and I am sure storekeepers get twenty-five per cent. here."

"I do not."

"Dick, you were bookkeeper and cashier were you not for two years?"

"Yes, sir."

"What were the profits then?"

"Twenty-five per cent. the first year, and forty per cent. the second."

"See the difference, Bunco, and an increase of fifteen per cent. on the second year."

"I guess your profits for the past year have been about half your investment; but I'll not be hard on you, so we will consider that you owe Dick just fifteen thousand dollars."

"I'll never pay it! The store is not worth that much."

"Will you take that for the store and stock as it stands?"

"I will not."

"Will you take twenty-five thousand?"

"I do not care to sell out."

"No; but you will pay that money, and at once."

"I have not got it."

"Dick will show you where to find it, and more, too."

"I won't pay it."

"Very well; do you see these?"

And Buffalo Bill took from his pocket a pair of handcuffs.

The man turned deadly pale.

"Now look at this and see if you do not know it as a badge of special officer, of General Dave Cook's Rocky Mountain Detective League?"

And he showed a large gold shield fastened on the inner side of his hunting-coat.

All present readily knew the badge, and many a heart quaked from a guilty conscience.

"Now, judge, I know that you are wanted elsewhere, and if you do not wish to go you can just pay over that sum in United States greenbacks, allowing the difference for the premium on gold."

"And then I will not be further troubled?" eagerly asked the man.

"You will be square with Dick, and that is all I care for just now."

"I'll do it, if he will give me a quit claim."

"He will do so."

"I will have to go and get it."

"Certainly, and for fear you may get lost Surgeon Powell will accompany you."

Bunco uttered a suppressed oath, but he had no help for it and went with Frank Powell to get the money.

They soon returned and the bills were counted out and found to be correct, after which Deer-Eye Dick wrote the quit claim.

"Mr. Cody, will you keep this money for me?" asked the youth.

"Surgeon Powell will, Dick, for I am dealing more in lead and steel, yes, and ropes, than in bank-notes," was the significant reply, and then he said aloud:

"Now, landlord, as we wish to remain in Saw Dust City awhile we wish to be your guests, and maybe before we leave your Unknown friend will put in an appearance, while we would like to attend the trial of this gentleman here who is also accused of murder, and who, from his looks, I say is falsely accused."

"There comes the Unknown now," cried a voice.

"Yes; and Mad Eye's with him," said another.

"The Indian and the nigger, too," a third called out.

"Oh, he means business, he does, and we'll see who crawls off, the Unknown or Buffalo Bill," cried Bunco, with huge delight.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE MEETING.

A QUICK glance at the mysterious stranger of Saw Dust City, was all that Buffalo Bill gave him as he rode up, and then a look passed between the scout and his three comrades.

It was certain that Bunco, thwarted in his persecution and prosecution of Deer-Eye Dick, meant to be revengeful toward Buck Bradford, whom he looked upon as the direct cause of his failure, as, but for the miner's defense of the youth, he would have had the prisoner comfortably hanged before the coming of Buffalo Bill and his comrades, so he called upon the jury to detain the accused for trial.

"Remember, Buck Bradford, you are a prisoner," said the foreman of the jury.

"I'll be here to stand my trial when you are ready for me, but I'll not submit to being held by any of you," was the answer.

"I'll guarantee the presence of that gentleman," said Buffalo Bill.

"Your guarantee hain't worth nothing to me," growled the foreman.

"What do you wish then?"

"To put irons on that prisoner."

"That you shall not do, so you must take my guarantee that he will be here when wanted."

"You'd lie as quick as he would."

The foreman meant this to be heard by his comrades, to "show off," not intending it for the scout, who had turned away.

But it reached the keen ears of Buffalo Bill, who wheeled quickly, sent his right arm out straight from the shoulder, and sent the insulter flying back into the arms of his companions, whom his weight forced down with him to the piazza floor.

"Do you wish to press this further?" sternly asked the scout, addressing the half-dazed man.

"Not now," was the compromising response.

"Any time you please," and the scout again turned to Surgeon Powell, whose face however was toward the foreman, to prevent any treachery upon his part.

"Pards, Foreman Brunt went ter 'arth powerful sudden," said a miner.

"He thought a mule had kicked him."

"Don't he hit though?"

"Thar is going ter be music in Saw Dust City afore long, pards, and that scout will play ther organ."

Such were the opinions that went around, and the knocking down of the jury foreman, Brunt, would have created a greater sensation, had it not been for the coming of the Unknown, who was now riding up to the hotel.

With him was Mad Eye, and behind him came the Indian and the negro.

It seemed to the miner as though the Unknown had come prepared for war.

He glanced up at the piazza as he drew near, and his eyes fell upon the tall forms of Buffalo Bill and Frank Powell, and he half drew rein.

Then he said something in a low tone to Mad Eye, and received an answer.

Coming to a halt he dismounted slowly, threw his rein to the negro, and advanced toward the piazza.

All remained silent and watchful, for what did it mean but that the Unknown meant to alone face the bold men who had ridden into Saw Dust City, and at once taken the settlement of matters in their hands.

But the Unknown ascended the steps quietly, his hands at his side, and neither seeking his revolver.

Then the scout turned toward him, and he stood in an attitude that was ready for any scene that might transpire, though his hands held no weapons.

As the Unknown advanced a lane was opened for him, and men fell aside to give the two important personages full scope for anything that might occur.

With his stately step the Unknown advanced to within a few paces of the scout, then raised his broad sombrero politely, and said, in a tone most polite:

"I was summoned here to aid in quelling some disturbance, as I understood it, to clip the spurs of a band of desperadoes, and I find one whom I once knew well and always respected, Buffalo Bill," and the hand was extended.

Buffalo Bill was slightly taken aback.

He had expected war to the knife, and he found the hand of fellowship extended.

He had seen the stranger before he was sure, and he had the appearance of an army officer, which his semi-military attire carried out.

But he could not place him, and yet he could not refuse the proffered hand, so he grasped it, and said:

"Partner, you have the advantage of me, though I have met you before, I am sure."

"Yes, Cody, and under circumstances that were most painful to me in the long ago, and I am really glad that you fail to recall one whom misfortunes caused to give up the army and become a hermit, as it were, though I am well supplied with riches, I may add; but may I ask if that is not Surgeon Powell, known years ago as the Magic Medicine Man?"

"It is, sir; here, Frank, is an old acquaintance, though I do not know his name."

"I am, as it were, nameless, Cody," was the reply, said in a strangely sad tone, and he offered his hand to the Surgeon Scout, who said:

"Like Bill, sir, I have met you, but I cannot recall your name."

"A name is a very appropriate thing for a handle, Surgeon Powell, but when recalling it brings up only painful memories, it is better to let it remain unknown, and to all I am Unknown; but that will not prevent our renewing old friendly regard which I have ever felt for both you and Cody, and whose career I have watched with much pleasure."

"Permit me, sir, to present my comrades, Parson Ripley and my Boy Pard, Sol, who are with us on a little trip through the mountains, while as you were the judge against my young friend, Deer-Eye Dick, you know him of course, and I am surprised that you could have decided against him and in favor of that old fraud Bunco, Bunco, or Broncho, as he calls himself."

The Unknown shook hands pleasantly with the parson, then with Sol, and turning to Deer-Eye took his hand with the remark:

"With Buffalo Bill to square you, my young man, I would have decided your case differently, for I know he would not uphold one who was in the slightest way crooked."

"But I had reason to believe in Landlord Bunco, and did not think he would wrong you, and think he has made a mistake."

Deer-Eye Dick made no reply, and the Unknown called to Rum Charlie to set to work with his assistants and put out drinks for the entire crowd.

This was done, and after paying the large score the Unknown bade Buffalo Bill and his comrades good-by, after telling them that he would return on the next day to see them, and offering to render any service in his power during their stay, adding:

"I have some papers to get ready and send

off by a special messenger whom I expect to-night, and trust I will not have to make a little journey to a mine that I own, for I am getting old enough now to like my comfort."

"Vell, it vas my opinions you vas old enough to die," said Buckskin Mose, who stood near.

The Unknown smiled as he turned toward him and answered pleasantly:

"Whenever you deem that I have lived long enough, my Jew friend, you have but to draw and open fire."

"Vell, somedimes I expects to kill you, mine fri'nt, and v'en I gits me ready I will let you know about it."

"Any time you feel in the humor, sir."

And raising his sombrero the Unknown turned away, descended the steps, and mounting his horse, which the negro Black led forward, he rode off, while the surprised miners gave vent to their comments in various ways, all admitting that if the Unknown had come for deadly work, he had played a very clever game when he saw just who it was that Bunco had sent for him to kill.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

STILL UNKNOWN.

THE clang of the gong for supper created a diversion in favor of peace at the Sinner's Rest Hotel, and the new arrivals went to their rooms, which were near the one where Deer-Eye Dick had been held a prisoner, and which he still kept.

Then Buffalo Bill told the youth how they had come down upon the town by the mountain trail, and which had brought them to the stable in the rear of the hotel, where they quickly discovered what was going on and determined to take a hand in.

"Now, who is this mysterious Unknown, Dick?" the scout asked.

"I do not know, sir, nor does any one else; but I have seen him somewhere before."

"So have we, but not one of us can place him."

"At first I thought it was Carter Creighton in disguise, but that is no wig or false beard he wears, and his expression is wholly dissimilar, while I knew that man was dead."

"We are not so sure of that, Dick, for we are sure Carter Creighton did not die as we supposed, and we are now trying to find him, and more, we think he has again gotten the Wild Rose into his power," and the scout told of the kidnapping of Rose Ripley from her room on Long Island Sound, and that a dream of the parson had sent him West to search for her.

"Well, sir, I'll do all I can to help you find her; but if Carter Creighton is here Bunco should know, for they were friends."

"And this Unknown does not seem to particularly fancy Bunco?"

"No, sir."

"I must solve the mystery as to who the old officer is, for he looks every inch a retired general, and maybe he can help us find Creighton; but perhaps your handsome young miner friend, Bradford, can tell us."

"If any one can, he is the man, I think."

"We'll have him go to supper with us, with his pard, for I notice he had one."

"Yes, his name is Hank Holden."

"And the tall man with the whip on his hat, who is he?"

"Ned Talbot, the Overland stage-driver, and he befriended me, as did also the one they call the Jew Scout, but who I heard was the friend of Bunco!"

"Well, Deer-Eye, we'll get our friends about us, and we'll see that the young miner is not hanged for murder, unless it is proven on him," and the scout left Deer-Eye Dick's room and walked out into the large hall of the hotel to wait for the others.

He saw Buck Bradford talking with Hank Holden and Ned Talbot, and he at once walked forward and joined them, saying pleasantly:

"Gentlemen, I wish to ask you to go in to supper with us, and my friends will soon be along."

"We were about to go in to supper, Mr. Cody, as we saw you coming, and will join your party with pleasure."

"But let me present myself as Buck Bradford, while this is my side pard, Hank Holden, and Ned Talbot is the driver of the stage that comes to Saw Dust City twice a month."

Buffalo Bill shook hands with the three men, and led the way to his rooms, where they were presented to Frank Powell, the parson and Sol.

"So they intend to hang you to-night?" Surgeon Powell said, with a smile, addressing the young miner.

"Such was their intention, Doctor Powell; but you gave me a respite by your coming, and I think I will get fair play now," and Buck Bradford told the story of the election of a judge and jury, the coming of the ghost, and all that had occurred on their way home the night before.

"Frank, do you believe in ghosts?" the scout asked, with a smile.

"I did as a boy; but after the experience I had as a medical student in a dissecting room, and as an army surgeon, I have changed my mind," was the reply.

"Well, we must see this ghost; but tell me, Mr. Bradford, who is this mysterious stranger?"

"The Unknown?"

"Yes."

"I know nothing about him, more than that he arrived here in an ambulance, driving four elks, has two huge dogs, one white, one black, two splendid horses, a black and white, one rigged in Mexican saddle and bridle, the other in military trappings, and his three comrades are giants, a negro, a Chinnee and an Indian."

"He killed the man who had taken possession of a mine that belonged to me, and took charge of it himself, and lives there in style."

"He is the coolest man I ever saw in a racket, a dead shot, and spends his gold with a willing hand."

"Cannot Bunco tell me who he is?"

"Not he, and no one else that I know of, unless it is one person."

"Who?"

"Did you see that remarkable character they called Buckskin Mose?"

"I did."

"I believe he knows something about that Unknown, and my reasons I am unable to give; but certain it is that he seeks an opportunity for trouble with the stranger."

"I thought so, and I shall ask him when I can; but I shall also ask Bunco."

"I am sure he can tell you nothing about him."

The party of newly found friends now left the scout's rooms and walked toward the supper-room.

Bunco, with his usual obsequiousness to one he feared, met them and took them to his private table, which just seated the party of eight, and he did his best to set before them a most substantial supper.

"The old rascal sets a splendid table, I must say," said the scout, and all heartily acquiesced in this opinion.

The room was crowded, and as fast as one left the table his place was filled, for very few of the miners would go to their homes for supper, in anticipation of what would occur in the evening, so Bunco was doing a splendid business, as he had expected, at two dollars for a single supper and fifty cents for a drink at the bar.

"He'll raise his prices to-morrow to get back what he was forced to pay you, Deer-Eye," said Ned Talbot.

"Landlord, or, rather, judge, who is the Unknown that I had the honor of meeting this afternoon?" said Buffalo Bill, as Bunco came up and asked if they had enjoyed their supper.

"I cannot tell you, sir, though I would like to do so, for I never saw him in my life before he came to Saw Dust City not long ago."

"And who is that Jewish gentleman yonder, in buckskin?"

"His name is Buckskin Mose, and he is a friend of mine."

"I see."

And the scout bowed, as though to end the conversation, when Buck Bradford asked:

"Say, judge, when do you intend to try me?"

"To-night."

"And Mad Eye is my accuser?"

"Yes."

"All right, judge; I shall ask Surgeon Powell to defend me, and Buffalo Bill to watch you, the jury and Mad Eye, that there shall be no funny business about the trial."

"Yes, judge, and if you intend any ugly work I may as well warn you now that you and your gang will get the worst of it."

"You keep a most excellent hotel; I know not its equal on the border, and in that you are a judge of what a good house should be, and for all this I give you credit; but do not play any game in border justice unless you hold a hand full of trumps."

"Thank you, Buffalo Bill," and the landlord retired, inwardly cursing the man he dared not attempt to bully, as had been his wont, in a quiet way, with all he met, and in most cases with success he had played his bold game of bluff.

"In case they should decide against you, Bradford, do you know that you could depend upon any others here, for you see there are half a thousand men present," said the scout.

"Yes, there are many; but then I think your presence, with the Surgeon Scout, will keep even the most reckless ones from attempting an outbreak, for your fame is known all through the camps."

"Do not depend too much upon our reputation, or strength, though we will do all we can for you; but you and your friends here, who know the better men, had best tell them to take up a position on the piazza, and as near it as they can get, as this will give us great strength."

The party then left the upper room, while the two young miners, Ned Talbot and Sol, who knew most all of the men, went among the crowd, to pick out those whom they knew not to be of the reckless and desperate kind, and wished peace and justice, and hint that they had better gather as near the scout as they could, when all began to assemble to witness the trial.

As it was now dark, lamps were lighted all along the piazza, and the gong called all to assemble for the trial of Buck Bradford for the murder of Scar Face the desperado.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BUNCO SHOWS HIS TRUMP CARD.

WHEN Bunco left the table where he had seated the Buffalo Bill party, and received some good advice in the way of a warning, he went out into the hall of the hotel and sought Mad Eye.

Now the Sinner's Rest was really nothing more than a huge, rambling barn, for it was all woodwork that had received one coat of paint only.

Still it was a "grand hotel" for the border, and being well kept was exceedingly popular with the miners, while it was also the pride of Saw Dust City.

The hall was very long and very wide, running back to the weather-boarded dining-room, and with the saloon and gambling hall on one side, the office, and a few "extra" rooms upon the other.

Among the latter were Bunco's private quarters, with a passageway connecting with the "Bonanza Palace," and another going out to the stables in the rear of the store.

On this side also were the rooms occupied by Buffalo Bill and his party, four in number, and they had ceiled walls, that had been painted, while they boasted of pretty fair furniture.

The saloon was larger than the dining-room, and beyond it was a wing with a number of rooms, in each one of which were from two to six cots, a camp-chair to each bed, a tin basin, a bucket of water and a roller towel.

Up-stairs, for there was a second story over the main building, there were a dozen "boxes," called rooms, on either side of the hall, and furnished alike with those in the bar-room wing.

Such was the Sinner's Rest Hotel, and as it covered an acre and a half of land, it was a most portentous and pretentious structure for Saw Dust City, and it was no wonder that Bunco was proud of it.

Meeting Mad Eye in the hall, looking more vicious than was his wont, Bunco said something to him in a low tone, and the one-eyed worthy at once left the hotel, while the landlord sought his rooms.

They were certainly luxurious for the border. The walls had received two coats of paint, and several closets were visible here and there.

The furniture was good, and there was a real air of solid comfort upon all.

Going to a door, opposite to the one by which he had entered from the hotel, Bunco opened it, and there stood Mad Eye, who had come into the passage by way of the store.

"Come in, Mad Eye, for I want a talk with you."

"I'm willing, Bunco."

And the desperado threw himself into a chair.

"Can we prove this murder on Bradford?"

"I intends ter try."

"You fixed the bullet-wound all right in Scar Face's forehead, for it looked awful natural."

"Oh, yes; I fixed that all right, and I intends ter swar he were shot, tho', as you knows, thar were no wound upon him."

"What do yer think he died of?"

"Fright."

"You don't think he was killed?"

"Bunco, he wa'n't no man ter be killed and not hurt ther pilgrim as hit him."

"I tell yer he ran from that ghost, it caught up with him, and Scar Face tARNed up his toes, for he c'udn't fight a sperrit, c'u'd he?"

"No, if it is a spirit."

"If it hain't Bowie Ben's sperrit, what are it?"

"I surely cannot tell; but now to the trial."

"Yas."

"Have you talked with the boys about showing their hands against this Buffalo Bill, so that we can hang Bradford?"

"Yas."

"What do they say?"

"They is skeert o' thet man's shadder."

"Buffalo Bill's?"

"Yas; and t'other one, too."

"Doctor Powell?"

"Yas."

"They are bad men; but they are but two."

"There's the old Trapper Parson, and he hain't no slouch."

"Well?"

"And you know thet Old Nick's Kid kin shoot ter kill."

"Well, they are but four."

"No; fer Ned Talbot is goin' ter side with 'em."

"Five."

"Then comes Hank Holden."

"Six."

"And Deer-Eye Dick."

"Yes; I had to give him back his weapons."

"He's seven, hain't he?"

"Yes."

"And then there's Bradford himself."

"But he will be the prisoner."

"He'll have his guns all the same."

"No; he must be disarmed."

"Who's goin' ter disarm him, Pard Bunco?"

"You can."

"It hain't healthy exercise, and you might as well count him in."

"Then he makes eight."

"Then comes the Jew."

"Buckskin Mose?"

"Yas."

"He is my friend."

"Maybe he is and maybe he hain't."

"What do you mean?"

"I means that he sided ter-day with t'other party."

"I'll see him at once and get him over to our side."

"Then how many has we?"

"You, Buckskin Mose and myself are three."

"Yas."

"And the jury of twelve."

"That makes fifteen, but then Brunt, ther foreman, is laid up fer repairs, as thet cursed scout druv his iron fist inter his face like a mule's heel, and his nose would make three ordinary noses, while one eye is closed and t'other blood-shot."

"I tell yer, Bunco, I'd rather be kicked by a burro than have that scout hit me."

"He is a powerful man, Mad Eye."

"Ther Surgeon Scout are just as bad."

"Well, Brunt will have to be on hand, and we are fifteen against eight."

"The odds are ag'in' us, Bunco."

"With our side seven more than they have?"

"Yas; for if you take out me and you, look at thet jury."

"And the Jew?"

"Yas; he looks like a bad man."

"He is."

"Wal, they have Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon Scout as a starter, with lots more ter fall back on."

"Then we must buy up about a score of the worst of the boys."

"They's fer sale, but I hain't got no dust ter buy targets for Buffalo Bill and thet scouting doctor."

"Here, take these bills, and there's five hundred dollars there, and you should get men to back us for twenty-five dollars a head."

"Yas; and I'll try it, for I wants ter see Bradford hanged, as I'll have ter squar' with him ef he hain't, arter all I has said I would do fer ther gerlout as kilt my pard Scar Face."

"Well, we'll do all we can, and if you see the trial going against us, you start the cry that justice is being overridden and have the boys rush in, drive Buffalo Bill and his pard back and hang Buck Bradford."

"It's a good game, pard."

"And if we win, Mad Eye, we rule this town, and I'll make you my head clerk in the hotel and put you in the way of making your fortune."

"I'm yer man, Judge Bunco, and I'll buy up ther boys as will make Saw Dust City git on its hind legs and howl this night, you bet, for I wants ter larn how ter run a hotel."

With this Mad Eye departed the way he had come, while Bunco left his rooms in search of Buckskin Mose.

He found him after a short search and led him to his room for a talk, the subject of which will be found in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XL.

THE JUDGE AND THE JEW.

WHEN Buckskin Mose entered the quarters of Judge Bunco, the latter desired that his friend should see that he felt deeply aggrieved about something.

But the Jew scout did not, to the chagrin of Bunco, seem to observe the expression put on for his especial benefit.

"Have you nothing to say, Buckskin Mose?" asked Bunco, when he saw the Jew deliberately filling his pipe for a smoke.

"V'at vas you wants me to say, mine fri'nt. Boonco?" was the quiet query.

"I thought you had some explanation to make."

"I has."

"Well, w'at is it?"

"You vas a darnation fool, mine goot fri'nt Boonco."

"What do you mean?" was the hot reply.

"V'at I says."

"Did you come in here to insult me?"

"No, I vas come in here to tell you v'at I says."

"Buckskin Mose, I thought you were my friend."

"So I vas, don't I?"

"Yet you tell me I am a fool."

"Dot's so."

"And you side with my enemies?"

"Boonco, I vas side mit t'e mans v'at does right."

"You do not think I did right?"

"No."

"In what respect?"

"You vas make var on a poy."

"The boy should have been hanged."

"Yas, maybe you t'inks so, and I t'inks dere vas many beoples ought to be hanged mit a rope."

"Do you refer to me?"

"If t'e ropes vas fit your necks, you just puts it on and wear it."

"I do not understand you, Buckskin Mose."

"Vell, I tells you dat you vas not do right to try and hang dot poy."

"If you vas show him mercy, you vas be all rights."

"But you vas try to hang him, and den you have to pack downs v'en Puffalo Pill comes here."

"I vas see dere vas troubles coming, and so I vas take sides mit t'e party vot haf t'e rope."

"I vas haf ears, I vas hear talks, and I don't make no fools of Puckskin Mose, mine fr'int."

"And you think I should have saved the boy and taken him in with me as a partner?"

"It vas petter had you done so."

"By Jupiter, but you are right, and then I could have gotten him put out of the way slyly."

"That vas so."

"And about this trial to-night?"

"It vas not my funeral."

"If I make a break, you will see me through?"

"Through t'e ground?"

"No, through the trouble."

"What troubles?"

"I shall see that we hang Buck Bradford to-night."

"Vell, Puffalo Pill vas see dat you don't."

"I believe you are afraid of Buffalo Bill."

"I vas, and dat don't vas all."

"What else?"

"I vas afraid of the Surgeon Scout."

"You are frank to admit it."

"I vas scared."

"Do you not intend to help us out?"

"Who vas us?"

"Mad Eye and our party."

"How many vas dere?"

"Mad Eye, myself, the jury of twelve, and some twenty desperate fellows I gave Mad Eye the money to buy over to our side."

"Dey vas only thirty-four."

"Thirty-five with you."

"Vell, don't you count me ef you wants me ter see you buried up in Sinner's Hope Graveyard, for Puffalo Pill vill send you there."

"You advise me not to attack them?"

"I does."

"You will not help?"

"On, yes, if t'e moosic vas pegin, I vas play on my revolver too."

"They do not expect any attack."

"You vas know dat?"

"Yes."

"You ask dem?"

"No, but do you see that door?"

"Yes."

"It leads into a closet, as you see," and the landlord threw it open, displaying a small closet.

"Vell?"

"The back of this closet, you see, is a narrow door, and it goes into a space between the wood walls of their rooms, and I can see into them, and hear all that is said, by going along this passageway."

"Howly Moses! put you vas a terrors, shudge."

Bunco smiled, and then went on to say:

"I heard nearly all that was said, and I am confident that they do not expect an attack."

"Vell, you vas know best."

"I am glad you have shown me that you are not a traitor, for I could not understand your going over to the other side."

"No, I vas only on von side."

"Now, if we can kill this Buffalo Bill and Doctor Powell, it will be said that they got into a row in the mines and were wiped out."

"Then we must get rid of that old man, the parson, and that Satan's kid, Sol, while I look out that Deer-Eye Dick does not get away, for he has fifteen thousand and odd dollars of my money."

"Den dere vas t'e Puck Pradford and Hank Holden?"

"Yes, they must go under too, along with Ned Talbot, and that will end the gang, for that stage-driver must not live to go away from here with any stories about Saw Dust City."

"No."

"What stories are told must be told by ourselves, and we can whitewash the whole affair, if any trouble comes of it."

"Dat vas so, Boonco."

"And now tell me if you found out anything about that Unknown, as you went away to do?"

"He vas a strange man."

"A very strange man, and I have it in for him some day."

"Yes."

"Did you discover anything?"

"Nothings at all, mine fr'int, for nobody in t'e mines knows who he vas, or who he vas not."

"I sent for him to-day, feeling sure that he would kill Buffalo Bill."

"But he didn't vas kill him?"

"On the contrary he claimed acquaintance-ship with both the scout and Powell, though they do not remember just who he is."

"You know so?"

"I heard them talking in their room."

"I sees."

"And they said he looked like Carter Creighton, the man who run these mines once as Don the Monté Man."

"Put he vas not him?"

"Of course not, for I knew Don well, and yet he does remind me of him a little."

"V'at vas Puffalo Pill and dem beoples with him comes here for?"

"That I cannot find out exactly, though I did catch a few words as I went in, that Don was not dead, and that he had kidnapped the old parson's grandchild again."

"Vell, if t'e Don did so, Puffalo Pill vill find him out."

"You seem to have great confidence in what Buffalo Bill can do," sneered Bunco.

"I vas know him, mine fr'int, and don't you forgets it."

"Well his life ends this night, and don't you forget that, and we will wipe out the entire lot of them."

"Vell, it vas most time to pegins, so I vas go now."

"Be sure and take a stand near us."

"I'll be dere, Boonco," and so saying the Jew scout left the room, while the judge set to work to examine his weapons most carefully, and to slip into his pockets a couple of derringers, and into his belt an extra revolver.

Thus prepared, and a perfect perambulating arsenal, he went into the hall and began to get all ready for the trial.

As the men began to assemble for the trial, the gong having announced that the court was ready, a loud cry was suddenly heard, then a rush outside, followed by an excited movement of those within the hotel.

The cause of all this alarm was the next moment made apparent by the loud cries of:

"Bowie Ben's ghost!"

A moment after the crowd swayed away from the front doors of the hotel, and in stalked the appalling apparition which now had Saw Dust City in a fever of terror.

There was no mistaking it—it was the same weird-looking being that had appeared once before, and whom all said was the ghost of Bowie Ben.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SCOUT AND THE GHOST.

BEFORE the remarkable-looking being that entered the hotel, it was no wonder that the superstitious miners gave way, for a better specimen of a ghost on a rampage was never seen.

There was not a man in all that assemblage, excepting Buffalo Bill and his party, and perhaps Buckskin Mose and Deer-Eye Dick, but knew Bowie Ben well.

And yet there before them stalked the very man they had seen killed by the Unknown and buried.

And more, many had seen Buck Bradford and Hank Holden open the grave, and they beheld the body in its coffin as it had been placed at burial.

Yet there it was, in face, form, weapons, dress, the fac-simile of the dead desperado.

But the face was ghastly, the eyes set, the hands, white and seemingly lifeless, hung down by his side, and in the center of the forehead was the wound made by the bullet of the Unknown's rifle.

If it was not the spirit of Bowie Ben, then what was it? was the question that each miner asked himself and his comrades.

But none could answer this important query. As it entered the hotel the men slunk away from it and gazed at it in horror.

It was going straight toward the dining-hall, seeming to glide along, for its steps were noiseless, when Buckskin Mose called out:

"It vas hoongry. Vere ish Boonco, to gif Mishter Ghost some suppers?"

But Bunco had sought the seclusion of his room, at the first shout that told him the ghost was coming again.

Straight then to the bar-room went the apparition, and before Rum Charlie could escape the arm was raised and the long finger pointed to a bottle of the best brandy the hotel could boast of.

Rum Charlie set it out with trepidation, and his trembling hand placed a glass beside it.

Then the ghost poured out a glass of liquor and dashed it off.

"Dot ghost vas a drunkard sure," said Buckskin Mose, who was following the apparition at a safe distance.

"Ho, Buffalo Bill, why don't you tackle that ghost?" cried Mad Eye, in a sneering way.

The scout stood near the door of the saloon, his eyes fixed upon the strange being.

"If that is not a dead man, Frank, it's the walking photograph of one," he said to Doctor Powell, who answered:

"I do not make it out yet, Bill."

All eyes turned upon the scout, at the mocking taunt of Mad Eye, and the strange being stopped, let his seemingly sightless eyes roam along the row of faces, until they rested upon Buffalo Bill.

Then he walked toward the scout, and beckoned in a weird, uncanny way.

Instantly Buffalo Bill stepped forward, and

the ghost walked toward the door, still beckoning for the scout to follow.

"Don't go!" shouted half a hundred voices.

"It's a warning!"

"He'll lead you to death!"

"You're done for."

"That's your warning, pard."

"Stay here!"

"Break ther spell, or he's got yer."

Such were the cries heard upon all sides.

But Buffalo Bill said:

"You want me, do you?"

"Well, I'll follow wherever you care to lead," and the scout, amid breathless silence, passed out of the saloon, down the piazza steps and thence on down the street.

A few started to follow, but the uncanny creature stopped and waved them back, while Buffalo Bill called out:

"Go back all, for this is my picnic," and as the frightened followers fell back, the scout boldly followed the strange and supernatural-like leader down the deserted street, and up the roadway leading to the burying-ground on the hill, where lay the mortal remains of Bowie Ben.

"Say, Pard Ghost, I've got an engagement back at the hotel, so if it's all the same to you, show your hand here," called out Buffalo Bill, as the last cabin was left behind.

The apparition halted, turned, and walked back toward the scout.

Buffalo Bill had in his right hand a derringer pistol, and he was ready for any emergency.

But he saw that his strange companion showed no sign of drawing a weapon, and so he made no hostile demonstration.

Up to the scout walked the mysterious prowler, and stopping right in front of him said in a deep voice:

"You are Buffalo Bill?"

"That's what I am called."

"Why have you come to Saw Dust City?"

"To see the town and get acquainted."

"Did you know Bowie Ben?"

"I had not that misfortune."

"Do you know the man that took the life of Bowie Ben?"

"I know that he goes by the name of Unknown."

"And you know nothing of him?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish to find out something about him?"

"Yes."

"Will you go with me at midnight to do so?"

"Where?"

"On the mountain trail yonder."

"Why there?"

"He expects a messenger to-night."

"Ah! so he told me."

"Will you go?"

"Yes."

"Ask your friend to accompany you, if you wish."

"Doctor Powell?"

"Yes."

"All right; where will you be?"

"Meet me yonder in the graveyard, for the trail leads around it, and there is where the messenger will pass."

"At what time?"

"Before midnight."

"I will be there; but now answer me a question."

"What is it?"

"Who are you?"

"Buffalo Bill, I will tell you," was the deep and earnest response.

And the strange being stepped nearer to the scout and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

But Buffalo Bill did not flinch, and what he heard from the "ghost" in a low, earnest tone seemed to interest him greatly.

After quite a long talk the scout and the "ghost" walked back toward the Sinner's Rest together.

CHAPTER XLIII.

WHO KILLED SCAR FACE?

THERE was an uneasy feeling among the miners after the coming of Bowie Ben's ghost.

Many wondered that Buffalo Bill had followed him when he had beckoned him to do so, and others thought that the Surgeon Scout would have gone too.

But Frank Powell saw one person whom the others did not see start on after the ghost and the scout, and so he felt no anxiety.

"Should not some of us go, sir?" asked Deer Eye Dick, anxiously.

"Oh, no; Cody will take care of himself," was the confident reply.

"You do not believe that was a ghost, do you, sir?"

"No, indeed, Dick; I know it was not."

"I am really anxious about Mr. Cody."

"Well, do not be, for he'll come out all right, never fear."

A moment after the call came for the jury to take their seats and the judge to appear.

"Ah! that man Bunco is going to run the trial through while Cody is away; but we will

bluff him if he attempts any game," said Surgeon Powell.

But it seemed as though Bunco was going to have his own way, for he took his seat, the jury were quickly placed near, and the call for the prisoner to appear.

Buck Bradford walked to his place quietly and Frank Powell took his stand by his side, while the parson, Sol and Deer-Eye were near, and not far from them stood Hank Holden and Ned Talbot.

Buckskin Mose was not to be seen, but Mad Eye was there, confronting Frank Powell, and at his back were a score of men who looked the desperado from head to foot.

There were several hundred others there too, and one who studied the sea of faces before him would have picked out the good men and true in a bunch near where Hank Holden and Ned Talbot stood.

Bunco seemed to know these too, as men he could not drive or bribe, and he looked a trifle uneasy when he glanced at their number, which doubled his band of desperate fellows.

The rest of the crowd were in the background, just beyond the arc of light, cast by the lamps, and were a mixture of all kinds, ages, sizes and creeds.

They were the masses that did not care which way the trial went, rather leaned toward a hanging, but would side with the strongest party when it came to a matter of what they should do if trouble came.

All being in readiness the judge rapped for order.

There was very little disturbance in fact, for the ghost had awed them into silence, and those on the outside of the crowd kept one eye cast over their shoulders for the coming again of Bowie Ben in the spirit.

So the rap for order brought immediate silence.

With Buffalo Bill out of the way, and the Unknown not present, Judge Bunco talked quite glibly, though he kept his gaze upon the surgeon scout, whose stern, fearless face awed him to a far greater degree than he cared to admit even to himself.

There seemed to be something back of Frank Powell's look which he could not fathom.

But the judge told the story of the charge against Buck Bradford, and then called upon the witness, Mad Eye, to substantiate all.

Mad Eye told how he had searched for his friend, and hearing of the ghost, from those who had been with the party, and that Scar Face had been seen to fly toward the Park of Pines, he had gone there and found him dead in the cabin.

He saw the bullet wound in the forehead, and, placing his body on his horse had gone up to the hotel and made his report to the judge.

Then he had heard from the judge how the prisoner had reported having followed the ghost and Scar Face and found the miner dead by the Tower Rock.

This was sure proof that Buck Bradford had cruelly murdered his poor pard, Scar Face.

Then Frank Powell, acting as attorney for the prisoner, bade him tell his story, which he did in his manly, straightforward way.

"Why did you follow Scar Face?" the doctor asked.

"I followed the ghost, to solve the mystery as to who or what it was."

"Where did you find the body of the miner?"

"At the Tower Rock."

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir, for I felt his heart and pulse, and neither throbbed."

"Where was he wounded?"

"There was no wound upon him."

"What do you think caused his death?"

"I think he was frightened to death when he saw the ghost following him, and, unable to get over the rock into the river, just died in terror."

"There is a wound in the forehead here, and yet you say there was none?" and Doctor Powell laid his hand upon the forehead of the dead man, for the body lay upon a table near him.

"That wound was not there when we found him, and Judge Bunco told both Hank Holden and myself that there was no wound upon the body."

"What kind of wound is that, Mad Eye?" asked the surgeon.

"A bullet-wound, as any fool kin see," growled Mad Eye.

"Not being a fool I do not see it in that way, for I pronounce this hole in the forehead to have been made by a nail and a hammer."

This created a sensation with all, while Mad Eye was seen to glance quickly at the judge, who started visibly.

"And the ghost did not make the wound, nor did the prisoner, for here is the nail, and here the hammer, which I found in the room where the body lay all day," and Frank Powell held up the two articles.

The judge glanced appealingly at Mad Eye, and met but an appealing look in return.

"Thet man are guilty, and he shell swing fer it," yelled Mad Eye.

"I say no!"

The words rung out like a bugle, and Buffalo Bill stepped out of the door upon the piazza.

"I say he's guilty, and—"

"Hold!"

The word checked Mad Eye in spite of himself, and Buffalo Bill continued speaking rapidly and distinctly:

"I have a witness to present in behalf of the prisoner, and one who knows just how that man died."

"Witness, come forward!"

The door swung open and out stepped the ghost of Bowie Ben, halting in the full glare of the lamps.

"Don't that vas a most peautiful dead mans?" cried Buckskin Mose, who now advanced to the front.

"Silence all! Now, witness, who killed Scar Face?" Buffalo Bill asked in a voice that reached the very outskirts of the crowd, who had moved about in horror at sight of the apparition, yet stood, appalled though they were, to see the outcome of it all.

The hand was slowly raised, and the right hand pointed directly at himself.

"You saw Scar Face die?"

"I did," came in sepulchral tones.

"Where?"

"In the Park of Pines."

"Was he wounded?"

"No."

"What caused his death?"

"Fright."

"How so?"

"He fled from me, and I pursued him to Tower Rock."

"There he turned and dropped upon his knees; but I advanced on him and he fell over, dead."

"Then I hid until those two young men, the prisoner and his friend, came into the pines, found the body, and leaving it in the cabin, departed."

"And who are you, witness?"

"I am the twin brother of Bowie Ben."

A deep murmur went through the crowd at this.

"Tell your story."

"Poor Ben was a wild fellow, and would not work with me in a mine that I have, and which pans out rich."

He preferred to carouse here in the camps and go to the bad."

"I was coming to see him and try once more to redeem him, when I heard of his death, and at once I determined to play ghost and frighten the slayer of my brother."

"He boldly followed me to the cemetery, but I had a dummy figure there, stood up over the grave, and as he did not bring it down when he fired, he ran off."

"Then he sent his Indian chief, and he shot the dummy full of arrows and ran off in terror."

"Next came the Chinnee, and he followed the example of the others."

"Then I threw some flattened bullets upon the grave, along with the Indian arrows, and retreated with my dummy to my hiding-place."

"Such is my story."

A sigh of relief went through the crowd at this explanation, and Buffalo Bill said:

"Now, judge, I demand the release of the prisoner!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

AN UNEXPECTED INHERITANCE.

THAT there was trouble brewing no one doubted, for Mad Eye seemed determined to force a difficulty, and in this endeavor Bunco was more than willing to aid him, while the jury and the desperadoes, the latter hired for the occasion, were but tools of their leaders.

Bunco began to fear that Buffalo Bill held some grip on him, which he had not made known.

He did not like the handcuffs he had seen the scout have, and that gold badge as a Rocky Mountain special detective.

His safety lay in getting rid of Buffalo Bill and his party.

"Then I can sell out at a big price and seek a life of enjoyment, for I am rich enough."

Seeing just how matters were going, Buck Bradford at once determined to act in the matter.

After the words of the "ghost," he knew that no one believed him guilty of murdering Scar Face.

Still the crowd had been disappointed in missing two executions, and they were in a state of dangerous excitement.

A spark would cause an explosion, and the young miner saw that Mad Eye and Bunco were ready and anxious to set that spark on fire.

It could end but one way he knew, and that in the wiping out of the band of desperadoes; but then some valuable lives on their side would be sacrificed.

It might be Buffalo Bill, for he was but human, and it might be Powell; perhaps Hank Holden, or himself.

Then Deer-Eye Dick, Ned Talbot and Sol, not

to speak of the silent, stern old man, the parson.

Some of them surely would fall, and perhaps a number of them.

So Buck Bradford determined to act, and act at once.

Rising, he called for order, and all eyes were at once turned upon him.

"Gentlemen, it seems that though I am cleared of the charge of murder, in all honest minds, there is one here who still claims that I am guilty, and he intends to seek his revenge upon me."

"Now, there is no need of bringing on a general conflict, when Mad Eye can settle this matter with me, as his pard Scar Face meant to do when the supposed ghost frightened him to death."

"I do not care to live in enmity with my fellow-man, and therefore I say to Mad Eye let us end all this trouble by having it out, and I ask Buffalo Bill to serve me as a second."

"I am willing," growled Mad Eye; but his words were drowned in the wild cheer given Buck Bradford.

"Don't yer speak!"

"Does yer crawl?"

"Hain't yer no grit?"

"Did yer hear him?"

"Is you a coward?"

"Brace up, man, brace up!"

"Don't sneak out!"

"You begun ther music, so pay ther fiddler."

Such expressions went up on all sides, until the maddened man shouted savagely:

"I told him I'd meet him, and I says now he are my game."

"I names Judge Bunco for my second."

"You are a fool, for we should rush this and wipe all out," said Bunco.

"It could not be did, pard, for don't you see they holds trumps?"

And so it was decided to have a duel, and the saloon was selected as the best place.

Bunco was in great anxiety and suspense, for he felt that perhaps his own downfall was at hand.

But arrangements were quickly made for the duel, and it was but a short while before the two men were placed in position, back to back, and revolver in hand.

They were then to march off ten paces, as called off by the scout, wheel on the tenth and advance on each other, firing until one fell, or both, as the case might be.

"Hank, if I go under you know where to find my dust and papers, and they'll say what you are to do with them, and I want you to carry out my wishes," said Buck.

"I'll do it, pard, though I don't take any stock in your going under."

"You'll find I leave all to a little girl sweetheart of mine."

"I saved her life one day when a steamer we were traveling on sunk."

"Then I went along for several days with her and her family, and never saw her afterward; but I never forgot her, and she may be married now, though I did intend to look her up some day when I had dug a fortune out of the ground."

"You'll find her name and address among my papers, for they were going West to settle, and all I've got I wish to leave her."

Hank promised faithfully to carry out his friend's wishes, grasped his hand with a word of encouragement, and then Buck Bradford took his position.

The word to start was given by Buffalo Bill, the steps were called out in a quick, distinct voice, and the march of death was begun.

At the word *ten*, the two men wheeled as upon a pivot, and Mad Eye fired ere he got fairly around to step off, and the bullet cut through Buck Bradford's sombrero.

But the young miner's shot followed quickly and it went to the heart of Mad Eye, who fell forward, dropped his revolver, seized it, and rising in a death-agony, would have shot his foe, now unsuspecting danger, had not Deer-Eye Dick sprung forward and kicked the weapon from his hand.

But the weapon went off, though the aim was destroyed, and Bunco received the bullet in his side, a chance thus bringing upon him his punishment.

Falling to the floor he attempted to draw a weapon as he shouted:

"Curses on you! I'll not die alone!"

But Buffalo Bill quickly disarmed him, and then the despairing man shrieked loudly for Surgeon Powell to save him.

"Back all of you!" said Frank Powell sternly, and from his belt he unfastened a little leather case of surgical instruments he never went without.

As he probed the wound Bunco said pleadingly:

"Don't tell me it is fatal, Surgeon Powell."

"I must tell you the truth."

"Then I will die?"

"Yes."

"And leave all my riches?"

"You will not live two hours, so if you have aught to say you had better say it now."

"Oh, God! I have much to say, for I have been a very bad man."

"I was a lawyer once, and doing well, and I had a lovely wife and a boy of three."

"But I was a fool, and insanely jealous of my wife, who devotedly loved me."

"One night I arrived home unexpectedly, and I saw a strange man enter my home ahead of me."

"There was a bright light in the parlor, and I saw him clasp my wife in his arms, and, in my mad fury I shot him and fled."

"I wrote her why I had done so, what I had seen, and learned long after that I had killed her own brother, who had been long away from home, and had telegraphed her that afternoon of his coming."

"My wife died of a broken heart, I heard, and what became of my little boy, I never knew; but my name was Henry Cobun, my present name being but a reversion of my real one, and my boy's name was the same, while I lived in the town of S—, in New York State."

"My name is Harry Cobun, and I came from S—, while my father killed my uncle and broke my poor mother's heart."

"I came West with a train, and the Indians attacked our settlement and took me prisoner."

"I was but twelve years old then, and I have knocked about like a stray dog ever since."

The speaker was Sol, and all eyes were upon him, the dying man seeming to read his inmost soul.

"You my son?" he gasped.

"It seems so."

"Where did we live in S—?"

"On Circular street."

"What was your mother's maiden name?"

"Ella Arondel, and here is her picture, though it's old and dim."

And the boy displayed an old miniature.

"You are my son, and I can atone for the past in leaving you a fortune."

Sol knelt by the side of his father and grasped his hand; he felt the solemnity of the moment, but he had no love for the man who was his father, and he said softly:

"God forgive you!"

"Doctor Powell, Buffalo Bill, you see that my boy gets my fortune, and you bear witness, all of you, that I leave it to him."

A few moments more and he was dead.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE MESSENGER.

Two hours after the death of Mad Eye and Bunco a horseman was riding rapidly along the mountain trail toward the roadway that descended into Saw Dust City.

He seemed to have been pressing his horse hard, and drew up to a walk as he came near the cemetery of Sinner's Hope.

The white head-boards looked like ghosts in the starlight, and he muttered aloud as he started his horse forward once more:

"If there's anything I am afraid of it's a graveyard."

Just then a lasso-noose settled over the head of his horse, and two men stepped out from the roadside and one said slowly:

"You are our prisoner!"

The rider saw that he was covered with two weapons and that his horse was held fast, so he said quietly:

"Don't shoot! I surrender!"

A moment after the horseman said:

"You are Buffalo Bill and Doctor Powell! I guess it's all up."

"And you are the boss of the Gold King's mine in the Rocky Mountains!" returned Buffalo Bill, recognizing the man that had been at the head of the miners in the gold canyon.

"It's no use denying it."

"You are on your way to your chief, who lives on the cliff above Saw Dust City?"

"No use denying it."

"Now talk straight, answer questions squarely and you'll save your life; but lie and give us trouble, and you'll hang for it. So, which will you do?"

"Tell the truth."

"Who is this mysterious man?"

"I don't know."

"You never heard his name?"

"I never did."

"When did you first meet him?"

"Nearly a year ago."

"Where?"

"He came to a mine in California where I worked."

"What then?"

"He engaged me for his work, to go with him and take some of my men with me."

"And it was to the Haunted Mountains?"

"It was."

"What else?"

"Well, he tackled a circus, and bought from them two fine horses, four elks and two dogs, and he took them with him."

"Then he trained them to obey him, and soon after he went off by himself, and came back with a big negro, a giant Chinese, and an Indian fully as big."

"I don't know how he trained these men, but they never speak before anybody, and obey him as his dogs and horses do."

"And he stayed some time in the mines?"

"Yes, amusing himself training his servants, dogs, horses and elks, and practicing with his rifle and revolvers in all kinds of ways, until I never saw a man who could shoot like him."

"And he had white hair and beard when you first saw him?"

"Yes, though neither were long, as they are now; but both were snow white."

"Did he tell you that he found the mine?"

"He said so, though I saw cut in the rocks on the ridge the name of the real finder of gold in that region, with the date and all."

"Do you recall the name on the rocks?"

"Roy Ripley."

"I thought so; but where are you going now?"

"To the chief's."

"You are going to make your regular reports to him?"

"Yes, for when he don't come he sends a letter by one of the dogs, or horses, and I then visit him wherever he may be."

"I see; but have you in no way ever found out his name?"

"Did you notice a large seal ring he wears, one of old pattern and very odd?"

"I have not noticed such a ring on your chief's hand, as I have only seen him once, and then he wore gloves; but I shall look for it."

"Now you were going on to the mine where your chief lives?"

"I was."

"Well, you are our prisoner until we have interviewed your chief, which will be in the morning."

"If he is the man we begin to suspect him of being, then you shall know just what we intend to do in the matter."

"If not, then you are at liberty to go your way."

"Pard, I am a square man, and I've tried to do right for the man I've been working for, though there was more mystery about him than I liked; but, if he's crooked and hiding for crime, I do not care to follow his lead, and I'll be glad to quit."

"I felt there was something wrong when you came up and camped in the valley with your pards; but I was not certain," said the man in a manner that showed he was sincere.

"Well, you will know all to-morrow, as to just who and what he is, and if we have stirred up a hornets' nest by trailing the wrong man, we must expect to be stung," said the scout, and the party went on their way to the hotel, to await the coming of the morrow, when the scout meant to solve the mystery that hung about the Unknown.

CHAPTER XLV.

BETRAYED BY A RING.

THE Unknown sat at his breakfast the next morning, and he appeared a trifle worried from some cause.

"I am surprised that he has not come, for he should have arrived yesterday afternoon."

"The dog has not come back, either, and I fear something is wrong."

"Red!"

The Indian whom he called came into the room.

"Mount your horse and go to the gold-mine with a letter I shall have ready for you, and take the white dog, Frenzy, with you, to send me back word in case there is need to do so."

"Ugh," was all the Indian said, and shortly after he rode away from the cabin, accompanied by the huge white dog, and bearing a letter which his master had given him.

"Black!"

"Yes, massa," and the negro appeared.

"I promised to go over to the camps this morning to see Buffalo Bill; but you go and tell him I am sick and unable to come."

"Yes, massa."

"Tell him I hope to come to-morrow, if well enough."

"Yes, massa," and the negro rode off on his errand.

"Melican man comee," said the Chinese, soon after.

"Who is it?"

"Heap funnee 'Melican man; talkee funnee with tong'ee."

"I do not wish to see him."

"Allee lightee," and the Chinese departed to head off Buckskin Mose, who just then rode up.

"Want to see t'e pig mans vat lifs here," said the Jew scout.

"He not homee."

"You vas a heathen liarmans, for I asked t'e niggers and he says he vas home, and I wants to see him most partic'lar for his own goot."

The Chinese was nonplused, but smiled blandly and said:

"Me see."

In a moment he returned with information that his master would see the visitor, and Buckskin Mose entered.

The Unknown sat at a table in his living-room, and did not rise to receive his visitor, who said:

"Goot-mornings, shentilmans."

"What do you want with me?"

"Pizziness, mine fri'nt."

"Well, be brief."

"Mine fri'nt, don't go too fast; but tells me if you owns this mine?"

"I took possession of it, as you know, after killing the man who dwelt here."

"He did not owns it."

"It matters not to me."

"It vas matter to me, mine fri'nt, for dis vas my mines."

"Yours?"

"Yes, I have t'e papers, and I pays my mon-ish."

"How much?"

"It don't vas matters how mooch, so I pays 'em, and I wants you to puy t'e mines or git out."

"I cannot be forced to do either."

"Don't you think so, mine fri'nt, for Puffalo Pill vas ofer in t'e camps, and maybe I tells him who you vas."

The Unknown started and the Jew's keen eyes saw it.

"Who am I?" he asked with his usual smile.

"Vell, I vas knows, and I wants to sell my mines."

"If you puy t'e mines, dat vas all right; if you don't puy t'e mines, den I vill tell somedings I knows to Puffalo Pill—hold on! don't you vas draw revolvers on me, for if you vas kill me dere vas bapers I left behind dat tells all about it, don't you know?"

"Do you mean to say you know my name?"

"Sure."

"What is it?"

The Jew scout whispered a name, but it caught the ear of the Unknown, and he turned deadly pale.

"You see I vas a truthful mans, mine fri'nt?"

"I will buy your mine, if you prove that you own it."

"Here vas t'e papers."

"Let me see them."

"Ven you tells me vat you pay for t'e mines."

"What do you ask?"

"I vant twenty t'ousand dollars, mine fri'nt."

"It may be worth it in the end, but I doubt it."

"Still I will give you your price, if you will leave this part of the country at once."

"I vill do so, very soon."

"Show me now that you own the mine."

The Jew scout spread his papers out upon the table.

"Great God! you ask me twenty thousand dollars for what you only gave five hundred for?"

"Dat vas pizziness, mine fri'nt."

"It was your sharp blackmailing, because you think you know who I am."

"Don't you puy t'e mines if you thinks I don't knows who you vas."

"I said I would, and I will, so I'll count out your money, and you can take part of your gold to-day, and come back to-night for the balance, for I will seal it up for you, so you will find it all right."

"Vell, dat is goot, so now draw up t'e papers."

This was done, the transfer was made, the money counted out in half a dozen little bags, which the Unknown secured by tying tightly and then putting on sealing-wax.

"You puts your seals on t'e papers and t'e pags, too," said Buckskin Mose.

And the Unknown drew a large seal ring from his finger and began to stamp the wax with it.

As the Unknown laid it down upon the table the Jew quietly took it up and began to examine it as the other's face was turned.

Then he dropped it, stooped quickly and said:

"Oh! that vas too pad, for I dropped your rings and it was go in t'e crack between t'e boards."

He knelt down to try and get it, but the Unknown said sharply:

"You should not have touched it; but let it go, for my servants will take up the floor and get it."

"Now you must go, for I never receive visitors, and after I have paid you what I have, I expect you will leave the country."

"Come back to-night and the Chinese will give you the balance of your gold, for I will not be here."

"All right, mine fri'nt, and I vas glad I be so rich mit investment of five hundred tollars."

"I vill not stay in Saw Tust Citys, so good-by."

And Buckskin Mose moved toward the door, carrying half of his money received for the mine.

He had just reached the bottom of the hill, when he was met by Buffalo Bill, Doctor Powell and quite a party of other horsemen.

"Well, Buckskin?" called out the scout, as the Jew rode into the pine thicket where the others seemed awaiting him.

"Here vas proofs, Pill, I vas sure."

And the Jew handed over the seal ring, which had not gone through the crack in the floor.

"None better, for here is his name within it, and it is the very name that I have seen him wear," said Buffalo Bill.

"It is his, and soon we will know all," the old person said in a tremulous voice.

"It's his ring," remarked Sol, or rather Harry Cobun, for he had resumed his name, "for I remember it well."

"Well, Buckskin, you have done well, and I knew that you would when I sent you here to ferret out whether that man was in Saw Dust City."

"Thank you, Buffalo Bill, but I've sold the mines for twenty thousand dollars, and the money he pays me was not his, so it belongs to the man who was robbed of it."

All laughed at Buckskin Mose's sale of the mine, while Buck Bradford and Hank Monk, who were along, discovered the fact that after all the Jew scout was the spy of Buffalo Bill, and had most cleverly fooled Bunco in trusting him to do his work, when he had gone off to put a man on the track of certain mysteries he wished to solve.

"Now, Buckskin, we will move on the enemy, for we have captured the negro and the Indian, as you see we have them prisoners yonder," and the scout pointed to where the twin brother of Bowie Ben, Ned Talbot and the messenger who had been captured the night before, stood apart with the Indian and negro—Red and Black.

"I will go on alone, and then, Frank, you come on with the reserves," and Buffalo Bill rode on ahead.

The cabin window was open, and through it Buffalo Bill saw the Chinese at work taking up the flooring of the room in search of the missing ring.

"Ho, my old army pard, how are you this morning?" called out the scout.

The Unknown started, and seeing the scout alone, came to the door, while he said:

"All right, thank you, Buffalo Bill, though I did have a sick turn this morning, and sent my negro servant over to the hotel to say I could not come over."

"There's been trouble over there, and I wish to have a talk with you about it, for that young miner, Buck Bradford, killed Mad Eye, and Bunco is also a dead man, and—"

"What! Bunco dead?" cried the Unknown.

"Yes, and that is not all."

"What else, may I ask?"

"You are my prisoner!"

The revolver of the scout was suddenly thrust into the face of the Unknown, who turned livid, and was about to call for his Chinese servant, when Buffalo Bill said, hoarsely:

"Make a call for help, and you die, Carter Creighton."

"You are mistaken; I am not Carter Creighton."

"You are, for this ring I wear betrays you, and Buckskin Mose is my comrade, whom I put on your trail."

"Your white hair and beard disguise you wonderfully, while you have become stouter, and changed the expression of your face, and added, by your very high heels, a couple of inches to your height; but you are Carter Creighton, alias, Don, the Monté Man; and more, you are my prisoner."

"Buffalo Bill, listen to me."

"Well, sir?"

"I have suffered as no man has. I escaped that day, though wounded, when you believed I had died, and I wended my way alone through trackless forests unarmed."

"I found a mine of vast riches, and, with what gold I could carry, I sought to enjoy life as best I could."

"One night, as I lay upon the ground in my solitary camp, I had a dream that was a frightful, appalling nightmare."

"I dreamed of suffering all the punishments man can suffer on earth, and that I did suffer in reality, though but a dream you may know when I say that my hair and beard were white as snow, as you see them now, when I awoke, while the very expression of my face had changed."

"Now you know what I have suffered, and if you will let me go free I will enrich you for I have the gold."

"I am not for sale, Creighton, and your mine I only came from a few days ago, while your boss miner is now my prisoner, I having captured him last night."

"The mine is the inheritance of little Rose Ripley, whom you now hold a prisoner."

"It is not so," cried the desperate man, though Buffalo Bill saw him start at the charge he made of his holding Rose a prisoner.

"It is so, for you have been to California, and I have heard from your messenger of certain things you did there which go to show that as soon as you got gold you dispatched men to the East on a secret mission."

"That mission was to kidnap Rose Ripley, and, when you had a bad dream, the old parson had a good one, and that was that you had his child."

"By Heaven! my revenge shall last if I swing for it, for I shall never tell where she is!" savagely said the man, and he seemed about to risk sure death in an effort for liberty.

But, Buffalo Bill saw the movement, slight as it was, and his iron hand grasped the throat of Carter Creighton, while he thrust him against

the side of the cabin, at the same time giving a long, shrill whistle.

At the call the Chinese, who had been busy within, looking for the ring, came out, when Buffalo Bill covered him with his revolver, at the same time shouting:

"Back into the cabin there!"

"Oh, Lordee! Buffalo Billee killee my 'Melican man," yelled the Chinese from within, his courage oozing out at seeing his master a prisoner.

At the same time Frank Powell, Buckskin Mose and the others came dashing up to the scene, and in a moment after Carter Creighton and the Chinese were prisoners.

In vain was it, however, that pleadings and threats were made to Carter Creighton, for he would reveal not a word as to what he had done with Rose, and his evil face showed perfect delight in thus having the secret as revenge against his enemies.

In looking over the papers of the prisoner, Frank Powell suddenly came across several letters, written to be mailed, the work of Carter Creighton the past night.

"As these are not mailed, I break no law in looking over them."

"Here is one to a banker in San Francisco; this one is to the Superintendent of the Mint; and this one I am sure solves the secret," and Frank Powell broke open the third letter, adding:

"It is to the manager of a Lunatic Asylum in California, and there is where I expect we will find the missing young lady."

"My poor child gone mad?" groaned the parson.

"Oh no! but placed there to cover up this villain's tracks."

"See, the letter says:

"Within find draft on my San Francisco bankers for the amount of three months' board and care of patient."

"I note what you say as to her imprisonment, and constant attempts to escape; but if she does you will never receive the reward I have promised, and the very liberal remittances I send will be cut off."

Respectfully,

"DON CARTER."

"The secret is solved; your child is found, parson," cried Frank Powell, and all pressed forward to shake the hand of the happy old man in warmest congratulations.

"Now, gentlemen, we will go to the hotel, and let the miners try this man for his crimes," said Buffalo Bill, and the party rode away with their prisoners.

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE trial of Carter Creighton did not take much time, with the evidence against him, and the miner jury, selected for the occasion, quickly decided upon his guilt, while Buck Bradford, appointed judge by acclamation, passed the sentence upon him of death by hanging.

The sentence was carried out the next morning, and Carter Creighton forfeited his life upon the gallows for his many crimes.

Knowing that the mine was the inheritance of Rose, the parson appointed Buckskin Mose manager, and Harry Cobun clerk, and they were to go back with Creighton's messenger and take possession, the three servants of Carter Creighton, who were guilty of no wrong, going with them to act as miners or servants, as required.

The next morning the parson, with Deer-Eye Dick as his companion, were to leave in Ned Talbot's stage for California, to seek the asylum where they knew that Rose Ripley must be; but that night an army officer with a troop of cavalry rode into Saw Dust City, and Buffalo Bill recognized the young captain, who was an old friend.

"Ho, Bill, the man of all I wish to see! which way?" called out the young captain.

"On my way back to the fort, captain, as Doc Powell and myself have now come to the end of a long trail," answered the scout.

"And is Frank Powell with you, here?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am very glad, for, Bill, I am in trouble."

"Can I help you, captain?"

"Indeed you can."

"The fact is I am on the track of my sister."

"She was a noble girl, and the idol of our home; but she ran off and married a wretched gambler and desperado, and we cast her off."

"She came to me a short while since at the fort, and I would have nothing to do with her, and so she left."

"Then she went home, and mother drove her off, and where she has gone God only knows."

"The truth is, Bill, my father died a short while ago, and, before dying, made a confession to me."

"It seems that he once killed a man, and but one person knew the secret."

"That one was the gambler my sister married, and he forced my father to give him a large sum of money, and told my sister that he would betray the secret and have my father hanged if she did not become his wife."

"Heaven forgive my father, but he allowed

her to do so, and he pretended to have cast her off."

"The man is dead, I hear, and his name was Red Tom, while my sister has been wearing the disguise of a man; but I am determined to find her and beg her to forgive us all, and take her home."

"Captain Deering, come with me," and Buffalo Bill led the way to a room in the hotel.

A knock caused it to be opened by Deer-Eye Dick, and the scout said:

"Miss Deering, I have brought your brother to see you."

Then Buffalo Bill hastily retreated, while he muttered:

"That's no place for me, now."

To but three others was the secret of Dickie Deering told, and they were the parson, Frank Powell and Buck Bradford, for the noble woman was none other than the little girl he had saved on the sinking steamer.

The next day Captain Deering left his troops to return with Buffalo Bill to the fort, while he went with the parson and his sister after the Wild Rose.

They found her as they had hoped, and in no wise a maniac, but ever watchful for a chance to escape.

And they heard her story how she had traveled far with Carter Creighton's hirelings, after her capture, and been supposed to be mad, and thus had they taken her to the asylum.

"But I made up my mind I would escape some day, and that upheld me in my suffering," she said pluckily.

Back to her home went Dickie, to receive a joyful welcome from her brother, and there one day went Buck Bradford to claim her as his wife, after which they came East to live, far from the wild scenes they had known in the West.

And back to her home on the Sound went Rose with her happy grandfather, and glad was the greeting from Clarice Kenedy, who was satisfied in at last knowing that her wicked husband had met just punishment for his crimes.

The Haunted Mountains Mine did not pan out as rich as had been expected, for it soon gave out; so Buckskin Mose returned to scouting once more, while Harry Cobun decided to go to college, and he deemed New Haven the very place for him, as it was not far from Parson Ripley's.

The result of this wise decision on his part was that after he had graduated with high honors he offered his heart, hand and diploma to Rose, then grown into beautiful womanhood, and all were accepted with thanks, as she had learned to love the young man who was so long a wild waif of the border.

As for the main heroes of my story, Buffalo Bill and Frank Powell, their names are known the world over, the famous scout now being as well known in Europe as in his native land, while Doctor Frank Powell, as physician and surgeon, and residing at La Crosse, Wisconsin, is truly one of the noted men of his adopted State.

With such heroes from real life, kind reader, my romance is by no means all fiction, as would be proven did I give the real names of Henry Cobun and Buck Bradford, who, as they now are, must still remain unknown.

THE END.

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